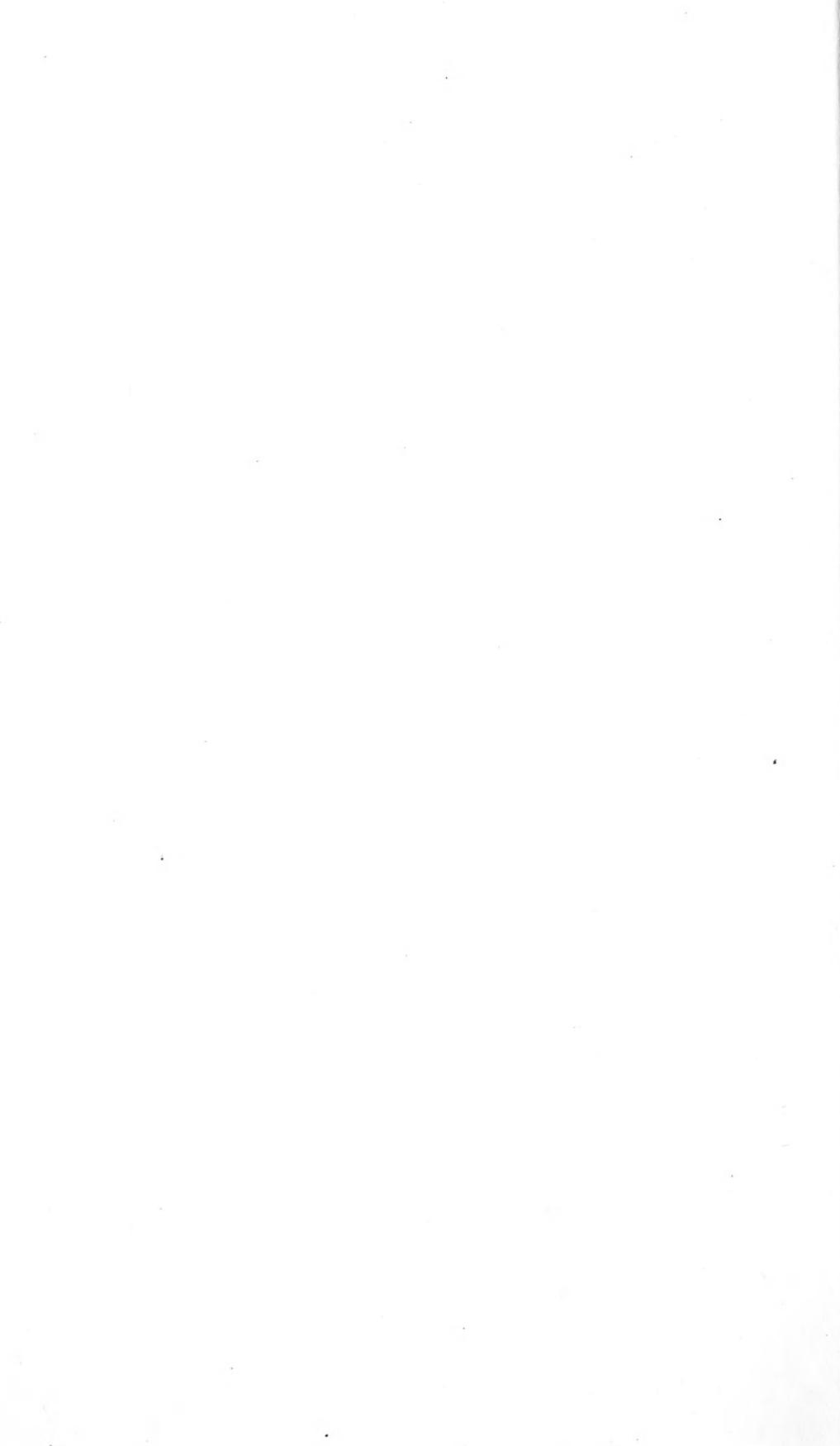


AN EMBASSY TO PROVENCE





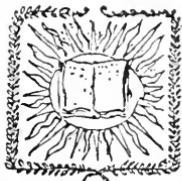
MISTRAL.

AN EMBASSY TO PROVENCE

BY

THOMAS A. JANVIER

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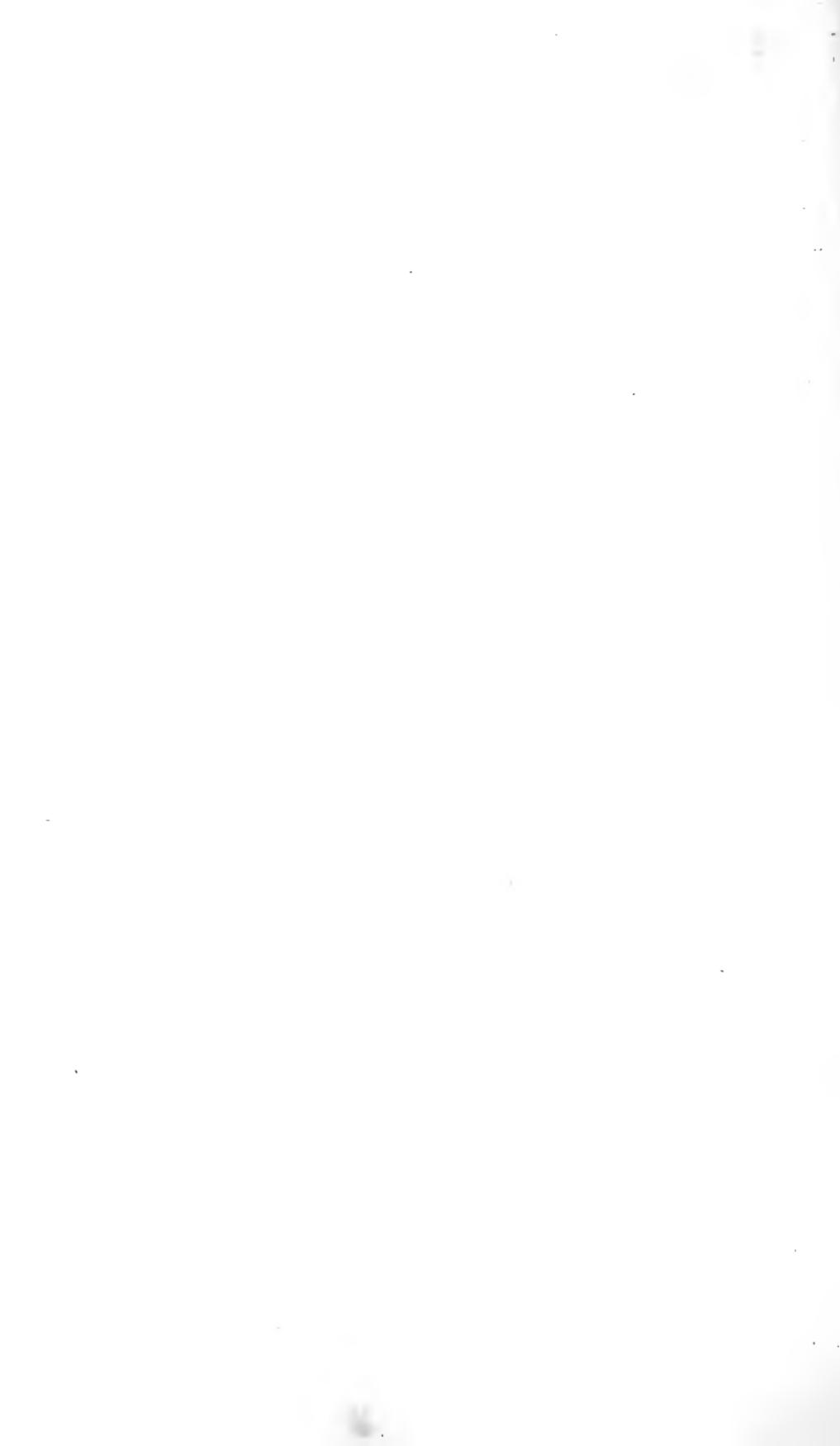
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TO

C. A. J.



THE NEW TROUBADOURS

(AVIGNON, 1879)

They said that all the troubadours had flown,—

 No bird to flash a wing or swell a throat!

But as we journeyed down the rushing Rhône

To Avignon, what joyful note on note

Burst forth beneath thy shadow, O Ventour!

 Whose eastward forehead takes the dawn divine:

 Ah, dear Provence! ah, happy troubadour,

 And that sweet, mellow, antique song of thine!

First Roumanille, the leader of the choir,

 Then graceful Matthieu, tender, sighing, glowing,

 Then Wyse all fancy, Aubanel all fire,

And Mistral, mighty as the north-wind's blowing;

 And youthful Gras, and lo! among the rest

 A mother-bird who sang above her nest.

RICHARD WATSON GILDER.



AN EMBASSY TO PROVENCE

PART FIRST

I

HAD we not gone roundabout through devious ways in Languedoc—being thereto beguiled by the flesh-pots of Collias, and the charms of the ducal city of Uzès, and a proper desire to look upon the Pont du Gard, and a longing for the shade of an illusive forest—we might have made the journey from Nîmes to Avignon not in a week, but in a single day. Had we made the journey by rail, taking the noon express, we could have covered the distance in three minutes less than a single hour.

The railroad, of course, was out of the question. Geoffroi Rudel, even in the fever of his longing to take ship for Tripoli, and there breathe out his life and love together at his

lady's feet, never would have consented to travel from Bordeaux to Clette by the *rapide*. To me, a troubadour's representative, the accredited Ambassador of an American poet to his friends and fellows of Provence, the *rapide* equally was impossible. Strictly, the nice proprieties of the case required that I should go upon my embassy on horseback or on foot. Consideration for the Ambassadress, however, forbade walking; and the only horses for hire in Nimes were round little ponies of the Camargue, not nearly up to my weight—smaller, even, than El Chico Alazan: whose size, in relation to my size, was wont to excite derisive comment among my friends in Mexico. The outcome of it all was that—compromising between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries—we decided to drive.

By a friend in whom we had every confidence, we were commended to an honest livery-man, one Noé Mourgue. It was ten in the morning when we went to the stables. Outside the door a lithe young fellow—a Catalonian, with crisp black hair, a jaunty black mustache, and daredevil black eyes—was rubbing down a horse. To him we applied ourselves.

“M’sieu’ Noé is absent upon an affair,” the Catalan replied. “He is a witness at the Palais de Justice. It is most provoking. But he surely will return at noon. That is of necessity—it is his breakfast hour. Even a court of justice is not so barbarous as to keep a man from his breakfast. Is it not so?”

We looked at carriages in the *remise*—it all was delightfully like Yorick, and the “desobligéant,” and Monsieur Dessein—but found nothing to serve our turn. The Catalan cheered us with the assurance that precisely what we wanted would come in that very night. At the moment, he explained, a commercial gent had it upon the road. It was a carriage of one seat, with a hood which could be raised or lowered, and in the rear was a locker wherein m’sieu’-madame could carry their samples with great convenience. It was in constant request among commercial folk, this carriage—not because of its elegance, but because of its comfort: it ran so smoothly that driving in it was like a dream!

A little after noon we returned to the stables. The Catalan had vanished, and the only live thing visible was a very old dog asleep on a truss of straw in the sun. The

dog slowly roused himself, and gave an aged bark or two without rising from his place; whereupon a woman came down the spiral stair from the dwelling-place above. She was in a fine state of indignation, and replied to our question as to the whereabouts of the proprietor hotly. "The breakfast of M'sieu' Noé is waiting for him," she said. "It has been waiting for more than a quarter of an hour. If he delays another instant the whole of it will perish! What are these judges thinking of that they keep an honest man from his breakfast? It is an outrage! It is a crime!"

Even as she thus wrathfully delivered herself, Noé returned; but with so harried and hungry a look that 't was plain this was no time to make a bargain with him. We assured him that our matter did not press; bade him eat his breakfast in peace, and to take his time over it; and to come to us, when it was ended, at our hotel—the Cheval Blanc.

When he presented himself, a couple of hours later, he was in the most amiable of moods, and our bargain was struck briskly. Provided, he said, that we took the horse and

carriage for not less than a week—here I interpolated that we should want it for a considerably longer period—we should have it for six francs a day; and, also, monsieur was to pay for the food of the horse. Nothing could be more reasonable than these terms. We accepted them without more words.

“And what sort of a horse does monsieur require?”

Monsieur replied that he required simply a good average horse; neither a sheep, nor yet a wild bull.

“Ah, the Ponette is precisely the animal suited to monsieur’s needs. She is a brave beast! Perhaps monsieur will not think her handsome, but he will acknowledge her worth—for she is wonderful to go! He must not hurry her. She is of a resolute disposition, and prefers to do her work in her own way. But if monsieur will give her her head, she will accomplish marvels—forty, even fifty, kilomètres in a single day.” And as to the carriage, Monsieur Noé declared briefly that it was fit for the Pope.

The excellent Noé, be it remembered, came to us fresh from the Palais de Justice, and the strain of delivering himself under

oath. We caught his veracity, as it were, on the rebound. There was truth in his statement, but the percentage of this element was not high. The Ponette, stocky, stolid, did have a considerable amount of dull endurance; but she was very much lazier than she was long. The carriage did run easily, for its springs were relaxed with age; but it was quite the shabbiest carriage that I ever saw.

In truth, when this odd outfit came to the door of the Cheval Blanc, the next morning, I had grave doubts as to the propriety of making use of it. Had the matter concerned myself alone, I should not have hesitated so much as a single instant. In small affairs I am no stickler, being well enough content to dispense with forms, provided I can compass substantialities. My position, however, was not personal, but representative; and as a diplomat I was especially bound to respect what an eminent legal writer has termed "the salutary but sanctionless code called the comity of nations"—being that courteous and friendly understanding by which each nation respects the laws and usages of every other, so far as this is possible without prejudice to

its own interests and rights. Would not the courtesy, not to say downright unfriendliness, of associating the Embassy with a conveyance so hopelessly undignified, I asked myself, traverse both the spirit and the letter of this code? And by accepting it, would I not therefore imperil the success of my Mission at its very start? Truly, 't was as vexing a problem as ever an ambassador just starting on his travels was forced to solve.

Fortunately, one of the troubadours of Nîmes happened along just then, and put heart into me. He had come to see us off upon our journey, and had brought to each of us, for a farewell offering, a poem in Provençal. They were exquisite, these little lays; and especially did the soul of thirteenth century song irradiate the one entitled "*Uno responso*"—which was addressed in what I am confident was purely imaginative reply to a strictly non-existent "Nourado," on the absolutely baseless assumption that she had asked him, "What is Love?" I state the case with this handsome series of qualifying negations because—this troubadour being a stout gentleman, rising sixty, most happily married to a charming wife—the inference

that his verses indicated a disposition to emulate the divided allegiance of Bernard de Ventadour is not tenable. But that Bernard would have been proud to own this delicately phrased and gracefully turned poem will surprise no one learned in the modern poetry of Provence and Languedoc when I add that its writer was Monsieur Louis Bard.

When we had accepted gratefully his offering of lays, I opened to him my doubts in regard to the fitness of our equipage; which doubts he resolved promptly by quoting from the rules laid down for the guidance of troubadours (and, therefore, for the ambassadors of troubadours) by Amaniéu de Sescas, a recognized past-master in the arts of love and war. A proper troubadour, according to this Gascon authority of the thirteenth century, must have "a horse of seven years or more, brisk, vigorous, docile, lacking nothing for the march." Monsieur Bard declared that the Ponette fulfilled these several conditions, excepting only that of briskness, to a nicety. "Take care never to wear a ripped garment," wrote the Sieur de Sescas; "better is it to wear one torn. The first shows a slovenly nature; the second, only

poverty." Applying this rule to the carriage, Monsieur Bard pointed out that while the slits in the leather were many, the rips were insignificantly few. And in triumphant conclusion he quoted: "There is no great merit in being well dressed when one is rich; but nothing pleases more, or has more the air of good breeding, than to be serviceably dressed when one has not the wherewithal to provide fine attire."

As our friend knew, this summing up of the matter fitted our case to a hair. More than satisfied with his reasoning, I ordered the valise to be stowed in the locker (in lieu of the samples which the Catalan had expected us to carry there); we mounted into our chariot; our poet bade us God-speed; the Ponette moved forward sluggishly—and the Embassy was under way!

II

OUR first intention had been to drive direct to Avignon; and we did, in fact, go out from Nimes by the Avignon road. But there was

not the least need for hurry: the troubadours of Provence did not even dream that an American embassy was on its way to them; there was no especial reason why we should be anywhere at any particular time. And out of these agreeable conditions came quickly our decision to drift for a while along the pleasant ways of Languedoc, taking such happiness as for our virtues should be given us, before we headed the lazy little Ponette eastward, and crossed the Rhône.

The tiny ducal city of Uzès seemed to be a good objective point; and it was the more alluring because on the way thither—at the village of Collias, on the Gardon—was an inn kept by one Bargeton, at which, as we knew by experience, an excellent breakfast could be obtained. It was the breakfast that settled matters. At St. Gervasy we turned northward from the highway into a cross-country road, a *chemin vicinal*; passed through the rocky *garrigue* region, and down to the river through a cañon that seemed to have gone adrift from the Sierra Madre; crossed the Gardon by a suspension-bridge, and so came into Collias an hour after noon.

On a very small amount of structural capital, the inn at Collias supports no less than three names. Along the end of it is painted in large letters "Café du Midi"; along the front, in larger letters, "Hôtel Bargeton"; over the main entrance is the enticing legend "Restaurant Parisien." Our previous visit had been upon a Sunday. Then the establishment was crowded. Now it was deserted. As we drove through the arched gateway into the courtyard the only living creatures in sight were a flock of chickens, and two white cats with black tails. All the doors and windows were tight shut—for breakfast long since was over, and this was the time of day divinely set apart for sleep.

The noise of our wheels aroused Monsieur Bargeton. Presently a door opened, and he slowly thrust forth his head and stared at us drowsily and doubtfully. Then, slowly, he withdrew his head and closed the door. From the fact that some minutes elapsed before he came forth in his shirt-sleeves, we inferred that at his first semi-appearance his attire had been even less complete.

"Yes, yes," he said, speaking in an injured tone, "breakfast can be had, of course. But

it will not be a good breakfast, and it will not be ready soon. The time for breakfast is long past. Everything must be prepared."

Fortunately, the end was better than this bad beginning promised. As he unharnessed the Ponette and stabled her, he shook off a little of his slumbrous heaviness and his disposition toward us grew less severe. The old woman whom he summoned to his counsels, from some hidden depth of the house, put still more heart into him. After a conference with her, while we sat on a stone bench beneath a tree in the courtyard, he came to us with a statement full of encouragement. It was all right about the breakfast, he declared. Monsieur and madame should be served with an omelet and sausages and fried potatoes; and then he came again to say that monsieur and madame should have a good cutlet and a salad; and yet later, with triumph, he announced that there was a melon for the dessert.

It was our fancy to have our breakfast served on the great stone table in the courtyard. Monsieur Bargeton did not approve of this arrangement—the table, he said, was only for teamsters and such common folk—

but he yielded the point gracefully. Over one end of the table he spread a clean white cloth; set forth a service of clean, coarse chinaware; brought us very fair wine in a wine-cooler improvised from a watering-pot, and then the omelet was served, and our feast began.

No teamsters came to interfere with us. The only suggestion of one was a smart black wagon, on which, in gilded letters, was the legend: "Entrepôt de Bières, Uzès." While we were breakfasting, the beer-man came out from the inn, hitched up his horse, and drove away. He seemed to be surprised to find us eating there beside his wagon—but he said never a word to us, and never a word did we say to him. The black-tailed white cats breakfasted with us, the boldest of them jumping up on the far end of the table, beyond the limits of the cloth, and eating a bit of cutlet with a truly dainty and catlike grace; and while our meal went forward a delightful old woman in a white cap and a blue gown made a pretext of picking up sticks near by that she might gaze at us with a stealthy wonder. It all seemed like a bit out of a picture; and when Monsieur

Bargeton, thoroughly awake and abounding in friendliness, came flourishing out to us with the coffee, we assured him that never had a breakfast been more to our minds.

Not until four o'clock—after an honest reckoning of eight francs and fifty centimes for our own and the Ponette's entertainment—did we get away; and evening was close upon us as we drove slowly up the hill whereon is the very high-bred and lovable little city of Uzès.

III

WE had hoped that three days of absolute rest in Uzès would have put a trifle of spirit into the Ponette; but this hope was not realized. She came forth from her pleasant pastime of eating her head off in Monsieur Bèchard's stables in precisely the same dull, phlegmatic condition that she went in. It was impossible to force her to a faster gait than a slow jog-trot. Left to herself—in accordance with her owner's fond suggestion—she instantly fell into a lumbering walk. But her loitering disposition was so well in accord

with our own that we found little fault in her monumental slowness. There could be no greater happiness, we thought, than thus to go idling along through that lovely country in that bright weather while our hearts were as light within us as the summer days were long.

The highway leading eastward from Uzès served our purposes far too directly for us to follow it. A minor road—going around by the northeast to another road, which ran south to a third road, which, doubling on our course, ran west again—afforded a circuitous line of approach to the Pont du Gard that was much more to our liking. Naturally, after having carefully looked out this route upon the map, and after having decided considerately to follow it, we abandoned it for something that we believed to be better before we had gone half a dozen miles.

Near the hamlet of Flaux we began the ascent of low mountains: a very desolate region of slate-grey rock, with here and there patches of scrub-oak (*chêne-vert*) growing in a meagre soil. Beyond Flaux, off to the right among the oak-bushes, went a most tempting road. According to the map it was a *chemin d'exploitation*. Precisely what

meaning attached to this term I did not know (I found out a little later); but the road possessed the obvious merit of leading directly across the mountain to the village of Vers, and thence the highway went onward to the Pont du Gard. Setting aside as irrelevant the fact that we had come out of our way for the express purpose of prolonging our journey, we decided to commit ourselves to this doubtful pathway for the good reason that it was a short cut.

We had gone but a little way along it when we met a carter (a treacherous person, whose apparent kindliness cloaked a malevolent soul) whose deliberate statement that the road was passable set us entirely at our ease. He himself had but just come from Vers, he said; and he gave us careful directions that we might not miss the way: We were to ascend the mountain, and to continue across the little plain that there was on top of it, until we came to a tall stone post at a fork in the road. This was a sign-post, but in the course of years the inscription upon it had weathered away. At this post we were to take the turn to the right—and then we would be in Vers in a twinkling.

After we left this betraying-beacon of a carter the road rapidly grew rougher, and the growth of scrub-oak on each side of it became so thick as to be almost impenetrable. The four or five bare little stone houses of Flaux were the last which we saw in a stretch of more than six miles. It was a most dismal solitude, having about it that air of brooding and portentous melancholy which I have found always in rugged regions desert even of little animals and birds.

We came slowly to the plain upon the mountain top, and to the sign-post whereon there was no sign; and there we took, as the perfidious carter had directed, the turning to the right. The road ran smoothly enough across the plain, but the moment that it tipped down-hill it became very bad indeed. Before we had descended a dozen rods it was no more than the dry bed of a mountain stream, cumbered with boulders and broken by rocky ledges of a foot high, down which the carriage went with a series of appalling bumps. To turn about was impossible. On each side of the stream—I prefer to speak of it as a stream—the scrub-oak grew in a thick tangle into which the Ponette could

not have thrust so much as her snubby nose. So narrow was the watercourse that the oak-bushes on each side brushed against our wheels. We were in for it, and whether we wanted to or not our only course was to keep on bumping down the hill. In my haste, I then and there cursed that carter bitterly; and I may add that in my subsequent leisure my curse has not been recalled. That he counted upon finding our wreck and establishing a claim for salvage I am confident. He may even have been following us stealthily, waiting for the catastrophe to occur. It is a great satisfaction to me that his pernicious project was foiled. By a series of miracles we pulled through entire; on the lower reaches of the mountain the stream became a road again; and as we swung clear from the bushes—getting at last safe sea-room off that desperate lee-shore—we saw the houses of Vers before us, not a mile away.

IV

VERS is a very small town, certainly not more than a hundred yards across, but in the

course of our attempt to traverse its tangle of streets—all so narrow that our carriage took up almost the entire space between the houses, and all leading down-hill—we succeeded in getting hopelessly lost. We descended upon the town at about five in the afternoon; at which peaceful hour the women-folk were seated before their open doors, in the shade of the high houses, making a show of knitting while they kept up a steady buzz of talk. Many of them had helpless babes upon their laps, and innocent little children were playing about their knees.

Our passage through the town even at a walk would have occasioned a considerable disturbance of its inhabitants. Actually, we spread consternation among them by dashing through the narrow streets almost at a run. This extraordinary burst of speed on the part of the Ponette—the only sign of spirit that she manifested during our whole journey—was due to extraneous causes. Just as we entered the town a swarm of vicious flies settled upon her sensitive under-parts, biting her so savagely that they drove her quite wild with pain. For a moment she stopped, while she made ineffectual kicks at

her own stomach; then she darted forward, and all my strength was required to keep her off a run. The women and children shrieked and fled from our path; bolting into their houses and, most fortunately for all of us, taking their chairs in with them and so leaving us a clear course. At the little *grande place* I took what looked like the right turn, but it really was a doubling upon our course—and in a minute more we were charging down the very same street again, scattering the crowds assembled to talk about the cyclone and to gaze in the direction in which it had gone. As these people had their backs turned toward us, it was only by a miracle that they escaped alive. This time I took another turn from the *grande place*—grazing a young woman carrying a baby as I rounded the corner; skilfully swinging the Ponette away from an open door that she seemed bent upon entering; and then forward among a fresh lot of women knitting and talking at their ease. The Ponette seemed to be quite crazed. Twice I succeeded in almost stopping her, while I tried to ask my way out of that little devil of a town; and each time, in the midst

of the answer, she made vain kicks at her luckless stomach, and then dashed forward like a simoom. Had I been driving a nightmare the situation could not have been worse.

A brave old man rescued us. While I held in the Ponette hard, he seized her bridle; and when he had calmed her by brushing away the tormenting flies, and I had explained that we were lost and had begged him to guide us to the highway, he smiled gently and in a moment had led us out from that entangling maze. The distance to the highway proved to be less than two score yards—but then he knew what turns to take in that most marvelously crooked town!

In my gratitude I offered the old man money. He refused to accept it: “I cannot take monsieur’s silver,” he said politely. “Already I am more than paid. In all the seventy years of my life here in Vers, monsieur is the very first who has been lost in my little town. It is most interesting. It is enough!”

In this position he was firm. I thanked him again, warmly, and we drove away.

When we had gone a short distance, I looked back. He was standing in the middle of the road gazing after us. His face was wreathed in smiles.

v

IN going from Vers to the Pont du Gard, and thence to Remoulins, we were compelled to travel by the great highways; but in going from Remoulins to Avignon we fell once more into roundabout courses: taking a *route nationale* north to the village of Valliguières, that thence we might go east by a cross-country road which traversed a forest, according to the map, and therefore promised protection from the blazing rays of the August sun. On the map, this Forêt de Tavel made a fine showing. On the face of nature, the showing that it made was less impressive. In fact, when we reached it we found that we had come a full half-century too soon. For four or five miles we drove across rocky hills more or less covered with oak-bushes, which in time, no doubt, will become trees. But of trees actually grown, we saw in this distance

precisely six. Unfortunately they were scattered at intervals of half a mile or more apart. They would have been more impressive, would better have realized our crude American conception of a forest, had they been in a group.

It was because of our detour in search of the shade of trees which had only a cartographical existence that our coming to the hills bordering the Rhône westward was delayed until late in the afternoon; and the Ponette walked up the long ascent so slowly, and so frequently halted—with a persuasive look over her shoulder that could not be refused—that when at last we reached the crest the sun was hanging low on the horizon above the summits of the Cévennes.

On the hilltop, with a sigh of thankfulness, the Ponette stopped; and for a while we did not urge her to go forward. Below us, in purple twilight, lay the Rhône valley: here widely extended by its junction with the valley of the Durance. On its farther side were the foot-hills of the Alps, with Mont Ventour standing boldly forward and rising high into the radiant upper regions of the air. Near at hand, down in the purple shadows, close

beside the river, was a dark mass of houses and churches, sharply defined by surrounding ramparts: from the midst of which a huge building towered to so great a height that all its upper portion was bathed in sunshine, while its upper windows, reflecting the nearly level sunbeams, blazed as with fire. And we knew that we were looking upon Avignon and the Palace of the Popes; and our hearts were filled with a great thankfulness—because in that moment was realized one of the deep longings of our lives.

The Ponette, with the carriage pushing behind her, went down the zigzag road, Les Angles, at an astonishing trot; but pulled up to her normal gentle pace on the level before we reached the bridge, and crossed that structure—over which a sarcastic sign forbade her to gallop—at an easy crawl. We did not try to hasten her pondering footsteps, being well content to approach slowly this city of our love: seeing below us the Rhône tossing like a little sea; on each side of us, in the central portion of the passage, the green darkness of the Isle Barthelasse; off to the left the surviving fragment of the bridge built seven hundred years ago by St. Bénézet

of blessed memory; in front of us the high houses of the city rising above their encircling wall. Slowly we went onward, and in the dusk of early evening we entered Avignon by the Porte de l'Oulle.

VI

WE had intended going to a modest, low-priced hotel—"un peu à l'écart, mais recommandé," as the guide-book put it—in the central portion of the town. The civic guard who halted us at the gate—to request our assurance that our light luggage contained nothing upon which the *octroi* had a claim—gave us with the good will of a true Provençal the most precise directions as to how this hotel was to be reached. Having thus directed us, he said frankly that we probably would get lost on the way thither; but added that anybody whom we met would be glad to set us on our course anew. This warning, and a single glance into the labyrinth before us, determined me against the adventure. After our experience in Vers—

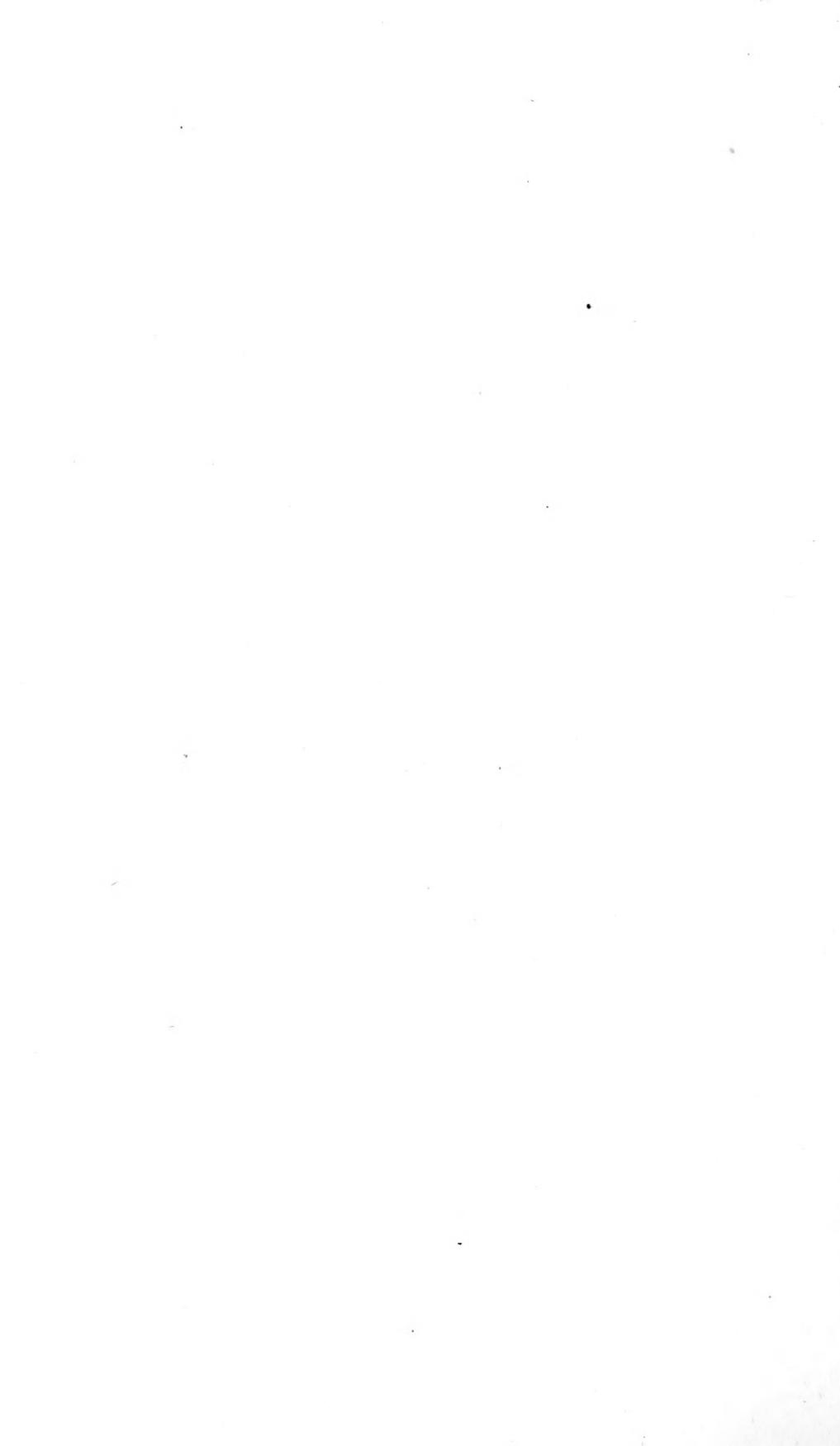
and Avignon was to Vers as a haystack to a wisp of hay—I had no fancy again to try conclusions with a maze; and I was the more easily seduced from this dangerous endeavor by finding, not a dozen rods within the city walls, the friendly open gateway of an inn.

It was the Hôtel de l'Europe, the most magnificent establishment in Avignon; the hotel to which, above all others, we had decided that we would not go. Without a moment's hesitation I drove the hopelessly vulgar Ponette and our shabby carriage through the arched gateway and across the courtyard to the main entrance. The *gérant* received us coldly; the waiters, in evening dress, regarded us with an open disdain. Even the stable-boy, called to lead the Ponette to her quarters, manifested a sense of the indignity put upon the establishment by interrupting my orders as to oats with a curt, “But yes, m'sieu’; I know, I know,” and going off with his nose ranged well in air.

It came upon us with a shock, this show of scorn. In the little towns where we had halted during the week that our journey had lasted we everywhere had been well received. At Tavel, where we had break-

fasted that very day ('t was a village that I had hesitated about entering in such poor array because of the sign at its outer limits: "A Tavel la mendicité est interdite") our host had volunteered the handsome statement that the Ponette was a brave beast with legs of iron; and he had spoken in tones of conviction which left no room for doubting that his admiration for her was sincere. But at Tavel, and through the whole of that happy week, we had been among the simple children of nature; in coming to the Hôtel de l'Europe, as we now sharply realized, we once more were in touch with that highly conventionalized phase of civilization known arbitrarily as Society, and were subject to its artificial laws.

As we were led to our gilded and red-velveted apartment—with a man in waiting to brush the Ambassador's rusty coat, and a maid to bring hot water for the Ambassadress—I could not but feel a shuddering dread that my mission might prove a failure after all! What if the Provençal poets should resent—even as the *gérant* and the waiters so obviously resented—the lowly state in which the American Embassy had come?



PART SECOND

I

HAVING been swayed by considerations partly diplomatic and partly personal, the Embassy had gone from America to Provence by a route which gave it no opportunity, so to speak, for changing cars. Diplomatically, the hope was entertained that by thus ignoring all other nations and principalities a more favorable impression would be made upon the high poetic Power to which it was accredited. Personally, the danger was recognized that if the Embassy—being by nature errant—were given large opportunities to stray, years might elapse before it arrived at its destination; to say nothing of the possibility that it might never get there at all.

Under constraint of these convictions our course had been shaped. On a grey morn-

ing in April we had taken ship at New York, and had glided out through the grey mists which enveloped the harbor into the grey waste of the Atlantic. Grey weather clung to us. Mist overhung the land when at last we sighted it, and Cape St. Vincent and Cape Trafalgar loomed large through a cold haze; when we passed the Rock, the base whereof was hidden in a mass of cloud, that considerable excrescence upon the face of nature seemed to have started adrift in the upper regions of the air; mist clung about the lower levels of the east coast of Spain, hiding the foundations of the snow-capped mountains and leaving only their gleaming crests defined against the cold sky; even the Gulf of Lyons was chill and grey. And at the end of all this, in a flood of May sunshine, Marseilles—in its glow and glory of warm color—burst upon us like a rainbow-bomb.

From Marseilles to Avignon, by the *rapide*, the journey is made in precisely two hours. The time consumed by the Embassy, however, in its passage between these points was three months and four days. I mention this fact in order to exhibit in a favorable light

our wisdom in choosing a direct route across the Atlantic. Had we made our landing at any port on the northern coast of Europe, with the consequent beguiling opportunities for lateral travel which then would have opened to us, I am confident that even now we would be working our way southward amidst enticing winds and luring currents toward our still far distant goal. It was only our firmness in resisting at the very outset all these attractive possibilities that in the end brought us to Avignon in what, I think, was a reasonably short space of time.

Aside, however, from the predilection of the Embassy for devious rather than direct ways, there were large considerations of policy which made advisable a slow advance from Marseilles northward. For the adequate discharge of our mission, it was very necessary, before presenting our credentials and opening official relations with the poets of Provence, that we should enlarge our knowledge of themselves, their literature, and their land. In truth, our fund of ignorance touching all these matters vastly exceeded our fund of information—a lack

of equipment for which I should be disposed to apologize were it not so entirely in keeping with all the traditions of American diplomacy.

Our whole store of knowledge was no more than a mere pinch of fundamental facts: that about the end of the third decade of the present century a poet named Joseph Roumanille had revived Provençal as a literary language; that to this prophet had come, as a disciple, Frédéric Mistral, who presently developed into a conquering and convincing apostle of the new poetic faith; that to these two had been gathered five other poets; that the seven, all dwelling in or near Avignon, had united—about the middle of the century—in founding a brotherhood of Provençal poets to which they gave the name of the Félibrige; that, in the course of years, this brotherhood had come to be a great society with branches, or affiliated organizations, in various parts of France and even in Spain. But of the poetry which these poets had written we knew nothing at first hand. We had not seen, even, either of the English versions of Mistral's "*Mirèio*"—the one by Miss Harriet W. Preston, the other by Mr.

Charles Grant. In short the attitude of the Embassy toward Provençal literature was as handsomely unprejudiced as could be induced by a liberally extensive ignorance of essential facts.

II

On the other hand, the Embassy did possess a considerable store of knowledge in regard to the group of Avignon poets personally; and all of it tended to induce a prejudice of a most kindly sort.

Eleven years before our mission was despatched, the American troubadour whom we represented had made a poet's pilgrimage to Avignon, and had been taken ('t is a way they have in Avignon) promptly to his brother poets' hearts. How unexpected and how delightful had been his experience best may be exhibited by a citation from the record made at the time by the historian to the expedition—who thus wrote, under date of the 8th and 10th of April, 1879:

“We have made a great discovery—a ‘nest’ of Provençal poets, all living and writ-

ing here at Avignon. Our own poet spent the morning with them yesterday, and came home bringing an armful of their books; from which, last evening, H—— read us some of the translations, which are very charming. One of the poets is Mr. Bonaparte-Wyse, an Irishman and a cousin of Napoleon III. He makes this his home for a part of the year, and writes the poetry of Provence. . . .

“We had a most interesting day yesterday. The little company of poets (‘félibres’) have united in doing honor to our poet and H——. They came, brought by Mr. Wyse, their interpreter, to invite us to a ‘felibri-jado’—a meeting, a dinner, speeches, poems, songs, everything delightful. We had been to Vaucluse for the afternoon—on our way home passing Mont Ventour with its snowy peaks, and the hills with their olive-trees and cypress dark against a pale golden sky. It was evening when we reached the hotel and found them all waiting for us in the little square dining-room.

“Mr. Wyse presided at dinner, with H—— and the Boy beside him: H—— wearing a bunch of starry blue periwinkle,

the flower of Provence, in her hair. Opposite to them sat M. Roumanille (founder of the School), with our poet beside him; and for my neighbor I had M. Mathieu, the oldest of the poets. Two young men were on the other side: M. Gras and another whose name I do not recall. Each one has a device and a name by which he is known among the 'félibres'—one a 'cricket,' another a 'butterfly.'

"After dinner a cup of Château-neuf was passed, and every one in turn made a speech and gave a toast. We were loaded to embarrassment with compliments, and our own modest little speeches—through Mr. Wyse's interpretation—were transformed into flowers of sentiment. The Boy, to his delight, saw very near him a dish of his favorite sponge-cakes—of which he sometimes had been allowed two as a special favor and treat, and to which he had given the name of 'biffies.' Kind old M. Mathieu helped him to these without limit—as H—— and I, happening to look at the dish, and seeing its great diminishment, suddenly perceived to our consternation.

“The dinner over, they led us up a dark old stairway into a long hall, dimly lighted, at one end of which a little candle-lit table was laid with coffee and delicious crystal-like cordials. The hall had been, years ago, a meeting-place of the Knights Templar; and there were still signs remaining of a little chapel there, set apart. Indeed, it all was like a little bit of the middle ages. After we had had our coffee, they gave us their songs and poems: one of the younger men stood up while he sang a sort of troubadour march to battle, his voice ringing through the great dim hall. M. Roumanille recited some Christmas verses, full of fine solemn tones; M. Mathieu, a little poem with the refrain *Catoun! Catoun!*—keeping time with his own airy gestures and waves of the hand as graceful as the lines. Mr. Wyse gave us some translations of Walt Whitman into Provençal verse. Madame Roumanille, too, repeated a poem for us—and our own Poet brought some verses which he had written at Vaucluse that afternoon and which H——— read in their French translation. They gave us some choruses. Many of their voices were rich and musical. Then H——— re-

peated for them those lines of Keats, beginning:

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!

and although they could not understand the words they felt their wonderful melody.

“It was very late when we went home through the quiet streets, escorted by two or three of our entertainers—one of them carrying the Boy. He had been safely tucked away in a bed at the hotel after dinner, and did not wake except—his head on his own little pillow—to say once (still dreaming of poets and sponge-cakes), ‘Nuff biffies!’”

Upon our troubadour’s store of delightful memories (only a part of which are referred to in the foregoing citation of history) we had drawn so often and so freely that these Provençal poets had come to be to us—while as yet our very existence was unknown to them—our own familiar friends. Time and again we had fancied ourselves knocking at one or another of their doors in Avignon; and thereafter, as we entered, receiving the

welcome which we knew would be given us so warmly because of our coming as the vicars of one whom they knew and loved.

And yet, being landed at Marseilles, close to these friendly doors which we were sure would be standing wide for us the moment that our status as ambassadors was known, we deliberately chose to make our approach to Avignon by methods so slow and by courses so roundabout that we spent more than three months upon a journey that could have been made in less than three hours.

III

OUR tarrying, as I have said, was the outcome of our intuitive perception of the requirements of diplomacy. Those whom we so longed to know were not mere ordinary men: they were poets. For us to cast ourselves upon them ignorant of their poetry would be a grave discourtesy; almost an affront. Common politeness, no less than our own interest, commanded that we should seek in their writings for that understanding

of their tone of thought, their purposes, their aspirations, which would enable us to meet them upon a common ground. And we realized that hand in hand with this study of their literature should go a study of their fellow-countrymen and of the land in which they lived. For which several reasons we perceived that the case of the Embassy was one that required slowness in order to assure speed.

At Marseilles, in the very first book-shop that we entered, the very first book that we bought was Roumanille's "*Oubreto en Vers*." It was to Roumanille, the Capoulié, the head, of the Félibres, that the Embassy specifically was accredited. Therefore was it fitting that our first purchase should be the volume in which his first poems are included—the sparks of pure fire which kindled anew the flame of Provençal literature in modern times.

The poems were in Provençal only. There was no French translation. Fortunately the Ambassadress—possessing an equipment of Spanish, Italian, and French, together with a certain skill in Latin—found the conquest of this language easy; and the Ambassador

profited by her gift of tongues to become acquainted with the spirit of Roumanille's verse. It was a most genuine poetry, and popular in the better sense of that injured word. With few exceptions, the themes were of a sort which country-side folk readily would comprehend; commonplace subjects made relishing, and at the same time shifted wholly away from the commonplace, by delicate turns of poetic sentiment or an infusion of genial humor or a sharp thrust of homely wit. Very many of the poems were homilies; but so gaily or so tenderly disguised that each went fairly to its mark without arousing any of that just resentment which is apt to annul the benefits supposed to be conferred by homilies of the usual sort. It was easy to see in these poems how and why Roumanille had laid hold upon the hearts of his countrymen. We ourselves, though losing much of their rich flavor of local allusion, yielded instantly to the blending of grace, freshness, humor, manliness, naïveté, which gave them so peculiarly original a charm.

In the same book-shop we found another volume of poems which greatly stirred us: "Lou Roumancero Prouvençau" of Félix

Gras. In our then ignorance, we barely knew this poet's name. But we had read no farther than "Lou Papo d'Avignoun" and "Lou baroun de Magalouno" when our minds were made up that here was a singer of ballads whose tongue was tipped with fire. They whirled upon us, these ballads, and conquered our admiration at a blow. We knew by instinct—what time and greater knowledge have shown to be the truth—that of all the Provençal poets whom we soon were to encounter none would set our heart-strings more keenly a-thrilling than did this fiery ballad-maker, Monsieur Gras.

It was in another book-shop, the friendly establishment of Monsieur Boys—a shop pervaded by that delightful smell of mustiness which, being peculiar to old books, sets every bookman's soul on the alert for the finding of treasures—that we came upon Mr. Grant's unrhymed English version of "Mirèio"; and so were able (having already bought the edition in which is the author's parallel translation into French) to essay the reading of Mistral's first poem with the double advantage of his own French version and of this literal English key.

English and Provençal, be it remarked, are more closely allied in genius than are Provençal and French. They have in common an honest directness, a sonorous melody, a positive strength; and even many almost identical words—for which reasons Provençal may be resolved into English with a close approach to literal exactness, and with little loss of the essence of the original phrase. Mr. Grant's translation of "*Mirèio*," it must be confessed, is not a brilliant illustration of these facts; but in Miss Preston's rhymed English version of the poem (at that time unknown to us) many felicitous passages show how successfully the soul and the body of the original may be transferred into English verse.

But these considerations of the verbal mechanism of translation came later. When we first read "*Mirèio*" we thought only of the poem itself: a perfectly simple story of country life which Mistral's genius has exalted to the plane of the heroic; an idyl which rises from height to height until it becomes a tragedy; a strain of pure melody throughout. Having read it—and after it "*Nerto*," "*La Rèino Jano*," "*Calendau*," and

the exquisite shorter poems, “Lis Isclo d’Or”—we were at no loss to understand why Mistral is called Master by his brethren of the Félibres.

Still another very useful book did we find in a Marseilles book-shop; one, indeed, which so substantially increased our store of necessary knowledge that I desire to place formally on record here my gratitude to its author: Monsieur Paul Mariéton. This book, “La Terre Provençale,” is a veritable treasury of information concerning the Félibres and all their works and ways; a blending of kindly personal gossip—so frank and so confidential that those about whom the author writes seem fairly to rise up in the flesh before the reader’s eyes—with a mass of accurate statement in regard to what these celebrities in the world of letters have accomplished, and about the beautiful land in which they live.

I did not venture to hope, while I was reading this book with so much satisfaction and also with so much profit, that in the fullness of a fortunate time its genially erudite author would become my friend; and I certainly did not imagine (though this also has

come to pass) that my life would be made a torment to me by receiving from Monsieur Mariéton letters in a handwriting so bewilderingly chaotic that to read them requires in every instance a special inspiration from on high!

And so, through the weeks and the months which followed our landing at Marseilles, we added constantly to our stock of books and to our store of literary knowledge; while from various points of vantage—Montpelier, Arles, Aiguesmortes, Tarascon, Beaucaire, Nimes—we softly spied upon the land. Through all this time we found growing within us a stronger and yet stronger love for a people and a literature whereof the common characteristics are graciousness, and manliness, and absolute sincerity, and warmth of heart. And all was so satisfying and so entrancing that the three months and four days during which we were upon our journey from Marseilles to Avignon seemed to us no more than a single bright spring morning: wherefore, as we sank to rest that night amidst the excessive gilding and red velvet of the Hôtel de l'Europe, we counted the evening of our coming to Avignon—as it

truly might have been had we gone direct from our ship to the train—but the evening of our first day in France.

IV

OUR hearts were beating many more than the normal number of beats to the minute when we set forth to deliver to the Capoulié of the Félibres the credentials of our Embassy.

These credentials—therein following primitive Mexican customs—were wholly pictorial. They consisted simply of four photographs: of the American troubadour whom we represented; of his dame; of their children; of their great dog. My instructions were to present these empowering documents to Roumanille, in his official capacity as Capoulié of the Félibres, and to tell him that with them came the love of those to whom love had been given by the poets of Provence eleven years before. And I was to add that in America still were cherished warm and grateful memories of those glad evenings

in the old house (the abiding-place of the Templars in Queen Jano's time) where the poet Anselme Mathieu in most unbusiness-like fashion carried on the business of inn-keeping: when the corks flew out in mellow cannonading from old bottles of precious Château-neuf du Pape, wine consecrate to the félibriens festivals; when all the poets wrote poems to their brother from afar; when the ancient vaulted hall of the Templars rang with the echoes of iambic laughter, and with the choruses of Provençal songs.

Knowing that English was a sealed language to Roumanille, I ventured to add to my pictorial credentials some written words which had the appearance of being English verse. The sentiments embodied in these supposititious verses would stand translation into French prose creditably; and I had the more confidence in their kindly reception because the Ambassadress had encompassed them with a decorative border of olive-branches, amidst which were blazoned the arms of Avignon and of our own country together with the emblem of the Félibres, a *cigale*. This illusive manuscript being inclosed in the official-looking envelop which

contained the empowering photographs, the Embassy moved out in good order from its too-magnificent quarters, and with a becoming dignity advanced upon Roumanille's book-shop in the Rue St. Agricol.

From the Hôtel de l'Europe to the Rue St. Agricol is a walk of but five minutes. As we rounded the corner from the Rue Joseph Vernet, we saw our Mecca before us—plainly marked by a sign on which was the legend in tall yellow letters: “Roumanille. Librairie Provençale.” Here, together, Roumanille had both his shop and his home. Directly across the street was the church of St. Agricol, wherein, in reverent faith, this good old man worshiped through so many years.

The door of the shop stood open. We entered into a bookman's paradise. The room, large and lofty, was packed with books from floor to ceiling; books were spread out upon tables; books were on nearly every chair; boxes of books and piles of books encumbered the floor. In the midst of this bibliographic jungle, at a desk everywhere littered with books and papers, sat Roumanille himself: a sturdy, thick-set man of medium

height; gray hair; beard and mustache clipped short and grizzled almost to white; fresh complexion; kindly light-brown eyes twinkling humorously under bushy gray brows; a racy and at the same time a very sweet and winning smile.

He rose slowly, and in accepting the package, and in listening to the message that accompanied it (which message the Ambassador prudently delivered through the medium of the Ambassadress), he manifested so marked a hesitation as to strengthen our already aroused fears that the Embassy might be rejected by the power to which it came. Later, when cordial relations were fully established, he explained matters. What with the appearance of the Ambassador (who by some twist of atavism has reverted to the type of his ancestors of three hundred years ago, dwellers in almost this very part of France), and the fluent French of the Ambassadress, his mind was all at sea. There seemed to be no reasonable connection between the messengers, who apparently were his own country-folk, and the message that they brought from friends who certainly belonged in a distant part of the world. Not until the mes-

sage had been repeated and explained a little, and the opening of the package had discovered the well-known faces, was the whole matter clear to him. And then what a welcome we received!

Madame Roumanille was summoned, and their daughters Mademoiselle Thérèse and Mademoiselle Jeanne, to take part in welcoming the representatives of the friends who had come and gone eleven years before—but who were remembered as freshly and warmly as though their visit had been upon the previous day.

From the shop we were led through the dining-room to the salon—a large room at the back of the house, facing south and flooded with sunshine, which gained individuality from delightful old-fashioned furniture, interesting pictures and curious antique bric-à-brac, and a Provençal tambourine and pipe hung upon the wall. Instantly our photographic credentials were ranged along the front of the pianoforte, and the whole family burst forth into eager exclamations and questionings.

“It is Monsieur and Madame to the very life! Just as they were eleven years ago!”

“And the children—how lovely they are! There was only one then. Can it be that it was this one—this tall boy? Impossible! He was but a baby. We gave him cakes!”

“And the gentle young lady who was with them—so quiet and so sweet. Why is not her photograph with these?”

“Heavens! How huge a dog! A St. Bernard—is it not so?”

“Ah, if only it were not their pictures, but themselves!”

Naturally it was the elders whose talk was reminiscent and comparative. When the American troubadour came with his train to Avignon, Mademoiselle Thérèse was but a slip of a girl, and Mademoiselle Jeanne was but a baby of two years old. But we found a pleasant proof of how well the visit had been kept alive in the elders' hearts, and of how much it must have been talked about, in the fact that the little Jeanne was quite sure that she herself remembered it all very well!

No one can refuse to credit the people of the south of France with warm hearts. But it is customary with travelers of a certain sort—possessors of acrid souls encased in thin-blooded bodies—to seek an apology

for their own genuine coldness by aspersing this genuine warmth with such terms as "impulsiveness" and "emotional effervescence," and by broadly denying that its source is more than a momentary blaze. Let such as these observe that we found that day in Avignon still burning warmly and steadily a fire of friendship lighted at a chance meeting and fed only by half a dozen letters in eleven years!

V

WHEN these kindly souls in part had satisfied their eager desire for news of the American troubadour and of those belonging to him, they diverted their interest in a hospitable fashion to his ambassadors, and with a genuine heartiness pressed us with questions concerning ourselves.

They were delighted when we told them that we had preferred to shun Paris, and to come directly from America to their own beautiful city of Marseilles; and more delighted to find that our plan for a whole sum-

mer of travel was a circuit of not much more than a hundred miles in Languedoc and Provence. As to our method of traveling—in the shabby little carriage drawn by the infinitely lazy little mare—they set our minds at rest in a moment by protesting that it was nothing less than ideal. And then they listened with great sympathy to the narrative of our small adventures by the way since our departure from Nimes. When we came to our entanglement in Vers, and the vast commotion with which our cyclonic passage had filled that very little town, dear old Roumanille fairly held fast to his comfortably fat sides and laughed until his cheeks were a-stream with tears. It was better, he vowed, than any farce!

When we touched upon the more serious side of our undertaking, our desire to study the new literature that in these latter days had blossomed so vigorously in Provence, their interest took a correspondingly serious turn; and the pleasure that our purpose gave them obviously was deep and grave.

Roumanille was gratified when we told him that his “Oubreto en Vers” was the cornerstone of our Provençal library; the book that

we had bought first of all. Speaking of it naturally brought to our minds the other volume that we had bought in the same shop and on the same day, and in very emphatic terms we expressed our admiration for "Lou Roumancero Prouvençau," and for its author, Monsieur Félix Gras. Before our eulogy was half concluded the entire family broke in upon us in chorus.

"*Mon frère!*" from Madame.

"*Mon beau-frère!*" from Roumanille.

"*Mon oncle!*" from the girls together.

Mademoiselle Jeanne sprang up and brought us a photograph of this dear uncle. "Ah!" she said, "you must hear him sing his poems—then you will know what they really are!"

This discovery that we had in France, as well as in America, a common center of affection brought our hearts still more closely together; it was almost as though we had discovered—as was not impossible—a relationship of blood.

In truth, all this warm friendliness stirred me curiously. More and more the feeling was pressed in upon me that I was returning—after a long, long absence—to my own

people and my own home. A like feeling surprised me when I first drifted across our southwestern border and found myself among the semi-Latins of Mexico; but the feeling was far stronger—from the very moment of my landing in Marseilles—among these my kinsfolk of the Midi. Truly, I was of them. The old tie of blood was revived strenuously by the new tie of affection. Notwithstanding the two centuries of separation, in coming back to them I was coming home.

VI

IN the evening of this happy day these new friends of ours—who already seemed to be such old friends—carried us with them to the pleasure-place dear to every soul in Avignon, but especially dear to the Félibres: the Isle de la Barthelasse.

Through the narrow streets we walked together: Roumanille bubbling over with wit; Madame abounding in kindness; the demoiselles like merry little birds. They apologized (quite as though it were a per-

sonal matter) because there was no moon—and we assured them that no apology was necessary; that we were more than satisfied with the mellow radiance of the Provence stars.

The Isle de la Barthelasse extends along nearly the whole front of Avignon in the middle of the Rhône. From the high causeway crossing it (and so uniting the suspension bridges which here span the divided river) pathways descend to the low, wooded island, but little above the level of the rapid stream. In among the trees is a restaurant; and in front of it, directly upon the river-side, are ranged many little semicircular booths of wattled cane—mere shelters against the wind, which lie fairly open toward the water and have no roofs but the sky. Into one of these Roumanille led us—that we elders might have coffee and liqueurs together, while the demoiselles drank syrup and water as became their fewer years.

It is the gayest and sweetest place for merry-making, this Isle de la Barthelasse, that ever a poet found. Our booth, and all the booths about us, shone bright with the light of candles guarded by tall, bell-shaped

glass shades; among the trees gleamed lanterns, lighting up the winding paths. At our very feet was the dashing river. Half seen in the starlight, across the tumbling and swirling dark water that here and there was touched with gleams of reflected light, were the walls and the houses of the ancient city. There was a constant undertone of sound made up of the rustling of the wind in the branches above us, and the gay chatter of the river with its banks, and the gurgle and hissing of little breaking waves; above this confused murmur, there came floating to us across the water strains of music from a military band playing on the Promenade de l'Oulle; all around us was a rattle of talk and a quiver of laughter; and, as the spirit moved them, one or another of our light-hearted neighbors, or a whole group of them together, would burst forth into song. It was as though an opera had broken its bonds of unreality and had become real.

In keeping with our joyous surroundings, Roumanille's talk was of the festivals of the Félibres; and mainly of the great annual festival whereof the patroness is the blessed Sainte Estelle, whose symbol is the star of

seven rays. On this notable occasion the four great divisions of the organization—corresponding with the four great dialects of the *Langue d'Oc*—are convened at one or another of the towns of southern France for the celebration of floral games; which games are competitions in *belles-lettres*, and derive their name from the fact that the prize awarded to the victor is a gold or silver or natural flower. They have come tripping down lightly through six centuries, these games, being a direct survival of troubadour times.

At the banquet which follows the literary tournament, the sentiment of amity and comradeship which is the corner-stone of the organization is emphasized by the ceremony of the loving-cup. Holding aloft the silver vessel—the gift of the Félibres of Catalonia to the Félibres of Provence—the Capoulié sings the Song of the Cup, whereof the words are by Mistral and the setting a ringing old Provençal air, and the chorus is taken up by all the joyous company; after which the cup is passed from lip to lip and hand to hand.

With due deference to the mystic influence

of their star of seven rays, the Félibres celebrate each recurring seventh annual festival with increased dignity and splendor. Then great prizes are contended for; and the winner of the chief prize wins also the right to name the Queen whose reign is to continue during the ensuing seven years. The requirements of the royal office are youth, beauty, and faith in the ascendancy of the Provence poets' star. It was at Montpelier, in 1878, that the first Queen was chosen: the bride of the then Capoulié, Mistral. The second, Mademoiselle Thérèse Roumanille, was chosen at Hyères, in 1885. We bowed to this sovereign, as Roumanille spoke, in recognition of the accuracy with which in her case the conditions precedent to poetic royalty had been observed.

But these light-hearted poets do not limit themselves in the matter of festivals to times and seasons. The joy that is within them may bubble up into a festival at any moment; and when their spirits thus are moved, a gay company, presided over by seven ladies and by seven poets, is convened—as Boccaccio might have ordered it—in the pleasure of some grassy and well-shaded park.

“Nor is even this much of formality necessary,” said Roumanille in conclusion. “It is a festival when two or three of us, or half a dozen of us, are met together—as we are met together now. Behold! Madame, here, is a Félibresse, and I, I am the Capoulié, the head of all. As for Thérèse, she is our Queen. What more would you have?”

And so, without knowing it—there on the Isle de la Barthelasse, in the midst of the dashing Rhône waters, in sight of the twinkling lights of Avignon—we had taken part in our first félibrien festival!

PART THIRD

I

NEARLY a month later, when we were established in Avignon for a long visit, we took part in another festival—this was in Roumanille's home—whereof the motive was our meeting with Félix Gras. During our hurried first visit of only four days, when we were hurtling across the Midi at the heels of the Ponette, Madame Roumanille's brother was out of town—he is a *juge de paix*, and his absence from Avignon was connected in some way with the issuing of licenses for the shooting season, which just then was opening.

They are tremendous fellows for shooting, the men down there. Daudet has told about it. When lions are about, they shoot lions. During the close season for lions, they shoot hats. It is all one to them. They have the true feeling. What they care for is the sport, not the game.

Fortunately, when we came again to Avignon the shooting season was well under way, and the magisterial duties of Monsieur Gras sat upon him lightly. It was arranged that on the second evening after our arrival the meeting which we so much desired should come to pass. Yet while we longed for this meeting we also a little dreaded it—knowing, by more than one disheartening experience, that highly idealized personalities have a tendency to come tumbling down from their pedestals when encountered in the flesh; and we knew that if this particular idol fell he would fall a long way. In the interval since we had read his “Roumancero Prouvençau” in Marseilles, we had read his “Tolosa” and “Li Carbounié.” With the reading of these poems—in which he manifests his power of sustained flight, though not always with the dramatic fervor of the shorter poems which had so entranced us—the pinnacle whereon we had placed him had grown perilously high.

But happily, as we came to know that evening, our ideal had not exceeded the reality. As fine and as sympathetic as his poems is Félix Gras himself. The gracious-

ness of his person, his gentle nature that also is a most vigorously manly nature, his quick play of wit, his smile, his voice—all were in keeping with, even exceeded, what we had hoped to find.

He sang to us some of his own poems—including, at our earnest entreaty, “Lou Baroun de Magalouno” and “Lou Papo d’Avignoun”—set to airs which have come down from troubadour times: curiously vibrant, haunting airs, which fell away in cadences of a most tender melancholy, and rose again with a passionate energy, and were pervaded by a melody sweet and strong. His singing was without accompaniment. Holding in his hand a copy of his “Roumancero” (it was our own copy, and is beside me now as I write), he stood up in the midst of our little company, and thrillingly sang forth his verses from his heart. Roumanille, his hands clasped comfortably across his well-filled waistcoat, beat time softly to the music with his foot; and when some passage especially pleased him gave vent to his emotion—and in this also keeping the time of the song—in a subdued utterance compounded of a grunt and a roar. Madame

Roumanille, her beautiful brown eyes glistening a little, regarded her brother with an affectionate delight, and turned to us from time to time with a sympathetic smile. Mademoiselle Thérèse sparkled with animation; and the demoiselle Jeanne—who already is an accomplished musician, with a rare power to command the presence of sweet sounds—listened with a rapt expression in her half-closed eyes. As for ourselves, it was as though a happy dream that we had been dreaming of a sudden had come true—in the land of the troubadours we were hearing a troubadour sing his own lays!

We tried the good-nature of Monsieur Gras sorely that evening. We could not get enough of his music. We continued to demand more and more. At last Roumanille intervened in his brother-in-law's defense by bringing up from the cellar a rare old bottle of Mouscat de Maroussan—a Frontignac which for thirty years had communed with its own soul within the glass. As he carefully uncorked it, and poured it in a fine stream into the little glasses, the long-imprisoned sunshine seemed to escape from its golden flow and fill, as did its fragrance, all

the room. There was to me a grave dignity about this wine, that had kept step with me in the life journey through three quarters of the way upon which I had come. Doubtless Monsieur Gras had much the same feeling. But with Roumanille the case was different—he was twice as old as the Mouscat. For all of us there was feeling of a deeper sort as we clinked our glasses, and with our lips drank to each other from our hearts. It means much, this toast, in honest Provence.

Already the evening was far spent. When we had thus pledged each other in aromatic sunbeams, we said good-night. What an evening it had been!

II

DURING this long visit we saw Roumanille constantly. Our quarters—in the Hôtel du Louvre, the old house of the Templars, where the poet Anselme Mathieu tried his hand at inn-keeping—almost adjoined the book-shop in the Rue St. Agricol. But a single house intervened. From our balcony we could look down upon Roumanille through the

side-window above his desk; we were in and out of the shop a dozen times a day; we spent delightful evenings in the friendly home which was opened to us so freely; Mademoiselle the Queen of the Félibres was our guide to the sights of Avignon and the Ville Neuve.

Our boxes of books had followed us from Nimes—coming by the carter, with the legend on each box, half warning, half appeal: “*Craint l’humidité*”—and Roumanille congratulated us upon the good luck that had attended our literary foraging. Thanks to the zealous assistance of my friend André Catélan, there were many treasures among our two or three hundred volumes. During our stay of two months in Nimes we had suffered few days to slip by without spending an hour or so with the good Catélan in his book-shop in the Rue Thoumayne—a little shop packed with books to the ceiling, and having in its center an island of book-covered table around which was a channel so narrow that only one person could sail along it at a time. When, as usually was the case, Catélan, Madame Catélan, and 'Toinette all were on duty together, we were compelled to sweep them ahead of us in a procession as

we examined the shelves. The dog, whose honorable name was *Ex Libris*, had a freer range—inasmuch as he could go beneath the island as well as around it. The kitten (a most energetic kitten) was freest of all—scampering under the island, and over its book-covered surface, and across the shoulders of any one of us who happened to come in her way. Of all the old book-shops of my acquaintance, none is dearer to me than this in the Rue Thoumayne; and excepting only one in the City of Mexico—which shall be nameless, for I still am using it—none has yielded me better returns.

As Roumanille went over our books with us they served as texts for his discourse. All of them related to the Midi, most of them to Provence or to Languedoc, and all of modern date were written by men who were his acquaintances or friends. His commentaries upon them greatly increased their practical usefulness, giving us the personal factor—the author's political or religious or poetical bias, his reputation for care or for carelessness—which enabled us to estimate accurately the value of the written words.

Roumanille told us, too, about the begin-

ning of his life-work, and how that work had gone on. It was with no thought of the far-reaching consequences that he began to write in Provençal. His sole motive was his desire that his mother, to whom French was an unknown tongue, might be able to understand what he wrote. He was but a lad of seventeen, a teacher in the school at Tarascon, when—writing in French—he first began to dabble in verse. One Sunday, when he was at home in Saint-Remy, his mother said to him:

“Why, Jóusè, they tell me that thou art making paper talk!”

“Making paper talk, mother?”

“Yes, that is what they tell me. What is it thou art putting on the paper? What dost thou make it say?”

“But it is nothing, mother.”

“Oh, yes, my handsome Jóusè, it is something. Tell thy mother what it is.”

But when he recited to her his French verses she shook her head sorrowfully, and sorrowfully said to him: “I do not understand!”

“And then,” said Roumanille, “my heart rose up within me and cried: ‘Write thy verses in the beautiful language that thy dear mother knows!’ That very week I wrote

my first poem in Provençal, ‘*Jejè*’; and, being at home again the next Sunday, I recited it to her. When she wept, and kissed me, I knew that my verses had found their way to her heart, and thenceforth I wrote only in Provençal.”

Did ever a school of poetry more beautifully begin?

It was in the year 1835 that “*Jejè*” was written, and immediately was published in a little journal of Tarascon, the “*Echo du Rhône*.” All the country-side was delighted by this poem in the home language; and Roumanille, being thus encouraged, rapidly followed it with others of a like sort. At a stroke, he had achieved a popular success.

But, as he continued to write—in prose as well as in verse—the larger possibilities which might flow from the revival of Provençal as a literary language presented themselves to his mind.

For centuries, while the north of France had been peopled by semi-savages, the south of France had been the home of a refined civilization. French literature had its birth here in the south. The traditions of that literature, preserved by the troubadours, were not lost; the descendants of the troubadours

still lived; but their songs were hushed because the critics of the north—the ex-savages perched upon the heights of their recently acquired civility—stigmatized Provençal as a dialect unfit for literary purposes; as a *patois*. Worse than this, with their tacit acceptance of a foreign jurisdiction over their literary affairs, the people of Provence were tending—as were all their countrymen of the provinces—toward an unreserved acceptance of Paris as a dominating center: to the deadening of that local love and local pride in which true patriotism has its strongest roots. And at that particular time—the seething years preceding the revolution of 1848—the sort of doctrine, political and social, that was emanating from Paris was to the last degree subversive of the manly qualities which are necessary to good citizenship, and to the foundation of a stable state.

III

THEREFORE was it in the spirit of the prophets of old that Roumanille settled him-

self to his life-work: the awakening of a dormant provincial literature, and the reinvigoration of a sturdy provincial manhood, which together would constitute an effective check upon the centralizing tendency whereof the object was to focus in Paris the whole of France. With these facts understood, it is easy to understand also why the press of Paris was united for so long a time in denouncing the purpose and in deriding the work of "the patois poets"; whose melodious verse, telling not less imperiously than sweetly of the reawakening of that beautiful language in which French literature was born, was a defiant proclamation of local rights as opposed to central power. In the broad sense of the word political, the literary revival in Provence has been a political force that already has made itself felt throughout the whole of France, and of which the future will have much more to tell.

Having grasped the possibilities of the situation, Roumanille never lost sight of them nor ceased to work for their realization. In prose and in verse he delivered his homilies —droll stories of the country-side, quaint

dialogues between country-folk, poems of country life, scintillating with a sharp wit which ever was mellowed with a kindly humor, or tender with a touch of simple pathos that went straight to the heart; and at the end always whipping out some earnest truth, as though by accident, which made in favor of the honest country life and a manly morality. They circulated wherever the Provençal tongue was spoken, these sermons—in newspapers, in broad-sheets, in little volumes; and wherever they were read the seed which they carried presently began to grow. When Roumanille published his first collection of poems, “*Li Margarideto*” (“The Daisies”), his fellow-countrymen already were sufficiently independent of Paris in their opinions to be proud of this their own poet who wrote in their own sweet tongue.

Two years before “*Li Margarideto*” was published—that is to say, in the year 1845—a disciple was raised up to this prophet in the person of Frédéric Mistral. He was literally a disciple, for Roumanille was a teacher and Mistral a pupil in a school at Avignon when the friendship was formed between them that was to last throughout

their lives. Mistral, a born poet, entered with enthusiasm into the project for making Provençal live again as a literary language; and it was he who sounded—when, in 1859, he published his “*Mirèio*”—the first strong poetic note which challenged the attention of the Paris critics; and which suddenly gave dignity to the whole movement by winning the hearty admiration of the critic whose opinion, still respected, at that time carried with it an overwhelming weight of authority—Lamartine.

But the Provençal movement, gaining force steadily, had assumed substantial shape five years before Mistral’s “*Mirèio*” appeared. In 1847 a fresh impetus had been given to it by the publication of Crousillat’s first collection of poems. In 1852 a congress of poets was held at Arles, whereat poems were recited by forty poets d’Oc—including Jasmin, Bellot, Castil-Blaze, Mouquin-Tandon, Crousillat, Aubanel and Mistral; which poems, with a striking preface by Saint-René Taillandier, were gathered into a volume that was published at Avignon in the same year. In 1853 a similar assemblage was held at Aix; and the sixty-five poems recited at this

gathering were published under the title: "Roumavàgi dei Troubaire." Finally, in 1854, came the crystallization—when, on the 21st of May, being the feast of Sainte Estelle, the Félibrige, the brotherhood of Provençal poets, formally was founded at Fontsegugne by Joseph Roumanille, Frédéric Mistral, Theodore Aubanel, Anselme Mathieu, Jean Brunet, Paul Giéra, and Alphonse Tavan.

They were of various estates, these seven poets. Roumanille (he became a publisher and book-dealer a year later) was a proof-reader in the house of the Seguins; Mistral was the son of a yeoman; Aubanel was a publisher—the last in Avignon to bear the official title of "Printer to the Pope"; Mathieu, who became an inn-keeper later, was a vine-grower—and so on. Over in Nîmes, soon to become a member of the fraternity, was the baker Jean Reboul—to whom, being dead, his fellow Nîmois have erected a statue to serve as a perpetual memorial of the glory which his fame reflects upon their town. It was a poetical democracy. The manner in which its members earned a livelihood was immaterial, for the writing of poetry was the real and important business of their lives.

On these same lines the organization is maintained. Poetry is the first and the highest consideration; after that come the ordinary affairs of life. Thus, in his off time, the poet Félix Gras is a judge; the winner of the first prize in the floral games of 1891 at Carpentras, Monsieur Lescure, devotes his leisure to charcoal-burning; Monsieur Huat, when not writing poetry, is architect to the city of Marseilles; Frère Savinien, author of the Provençal grammar, absents himself occasionally from the society of the Muses, and attends to his minor duties as director of the school of the Christian Brothers at Arles —it is the same all down the line. Truly, the Félibrige is one of the very noblest fraternities in the whole world; the single, but tremendous, condition of admission to the ranks of its membership is the possession of an inspired soul!

But underlying the poetry of these poets is their strong desire to foster a patriotism which best can be defined to American readers as a love of country based on state rights. The first article of the constitution of 1863 declares: “The Félibrige is established in order that Provence shall forever preserve

her language, her local color, her personal charm, her national honor, and her high rank of intelligence—because, just as she is, Provence delights us. And by Provence we mean the whole of southern France.” In the existing constitution (adopted in 1876) the wording is changed, but not the substance: “The Félibrige is established in order to unite in brotherhood, and to inspire, those men whose efforts are directed toward preserving the language of the country d’Oc.” Yet it is in no narrow spirit that these apostles of individuality carry on their propaganda. They insist upon being individual themselves, but they seek to encourage a like individuality in others. Roumanille spoke with the same hearty satisfaction of the spread of the félibrién idea throughout France, and even into foreign countries, as he did of its triumph in Provence.

In its organization, the Félibrige is practical; but in its systems of feasts, its awards of merit, its symbolism, it is poetical to a high degree. Doubtless its beautiful ritual—a large part of which it owes to its distinguished Irish member, Mr. Bonaparte-Wyse—has had much to do with its practical work-

ing success. In all this delicate fancifulness, which so vividly reflects the poetic temperament, there is found an irresistible appeal to poetic souls. The brotherhood has substantial strength because flowers are its prizes, the passing of the loving-cup a necessary part of its feasts, Ste. Estelle its patroness, and its device her star of seven rays.

IV

IT was during our longer stay in Avignon that we presented ourselves—formally, as an Embassy; and very informally, as individuals—to Mistral at his home in the village of Maillane. Close by this village he was born, and here always, save for short absences, he has lived.

From Avignon to Maillane the distance is not more than six or eight miles. We made it half as long again by fetching a compass roundabout by way of Château-Renard—a very ghost of a castle: its two tall, round towers, and a part of the wall which once stood solidly between them, rising ruinously

from a mass of ruins scattered over the top of a stiff little conical hill. Tradition declares that a subterranean passage, dipping beneath the Durance, connects Château-Renard with the Palace of the Popes in Avignon. Mistral has used the legend in a thrilling fashion—sending his lovely *Nerto* flying through this dismal place, and making very real the fear that besets her as she hears the rush of the river above her head, and the grinding and pounding of the great stones which are whirled along the rocky bed of the stream. Modern engineers have had the effrontery to assert that the passage is impossible; but I am the last person in the world who would set an idle engineering fiction in array against an established poetic fact. I do not doubt for a moment that the passage exists.

Our way led across the wide valley of the Durance, by the suspension-bridge at Rognonas, amidst market-gardens and vineyards and fruit orchards. Little canals went everywhere through the fields, that the river might give life to the land. Tall hedges of cypress, planted for protection against the strong mistral of winter, cut the landscape with long lines of dark green. Upon the road we

passed flocks of sheep returning for the winter from the high pastures in the French Alps; and with one of these was a sedate ass who carried in broad shallow panniers the lambs too young or too tired to walk. We accepted these flocks gratefully, not in the least doubting that they had materialized from "Mirèio" for our benefit. Here was the shepherd *Alari* coming down to the plain; here even was the delicate touch of "l'agneloun qu'es las"—the weary lamb. Indeed, all that country-side seemed familiar to us, so completely has Mistral transferred to his pages its every part.

Maillane is a village bowered in trees and girded about with gardens. According to the "Guide Joanne" it possesses three claims upon the attention of the public: a *beau retable* in its ancient church; in its archives a parchment of the year 1400; and—the writer has a proper feeling for climax—"it counts among its 1342 inhabitants the poet Frédéric Mistral."

When we asked the driver of our carriage if he knew where to find the house of Monsieur Mistral, he looked at us with an expression of pitying doubt—it was much as though

we had asked him if he knew where to look at noonday for the sun. His manner toward us had been gentle and considerate from the start. After that question it became quite fatherly. His feeling evidently was that people so largely ignorant required protecting care.

Mistral's home is a modest dwelling of two stories, standing on the border of the village, and separated from the street by a little garden and a low stone wall surmounted by a railing of iron. With a serene indifference to the ordinary scheme of arrangement, the house backs upon the street, and fronts upon a deep garden and the open country beyond. From the windows of the principal rooms—the library, the salon, the chambers above—the outlook is upon trees and flowers and green fields and orchards and vineyards, all roofed over with the blue sky of Provence. Nothing could be better. It is a poet's practical way of keeping the poetry of nature always before his eyes. The deep, wide garden is a delight: sunny and sheltered for winter, with shady alleys for summer idling, uniting the useful with the ornamental by giving room to vegetables and fruit-trees, as

well as to shrubs and flowers, and having as its chief glory a great hedge of nerto—as myrtle is called in Provençal—which has a reflected glory because Mistral has bestowed upon his gracious heroine its musical name.

v

ALL was still as we stopped before the closed iron gateway—so very still as to suggest the dismal possibility that the poet was off on one of his country walks, and that our coming was in vain. But our fatherly driver, knowing that the front of this house was its back, was more confident. Charging me to be watchful of the horse (it pleased him to maintain the flattering fiction that this sheep-like animal was all energy and fire), he placed the reins in my hands, and then went off around the corner of the house with our cards. We had not brought a letter of introduction; but our visit, though no day had been set for it, was expected—for Roumanille had made known to Mistral that an American Embassy was at large in

the land, and that sooner or later it would present itself at Maillane. We heard the tinkle of a bell inside the house, then a faint sound of voices, then quick footsteps on the gravel walk—and in a moment Mistral was coming toward us with outstretched hands.

What a noble-looking, poet-like poet he was! Over six feet high, broad-shouldered, straight as an arrow, elate in carriage, vigorous—with only his grey hair, and his nearly white mustache and imperial, to certify to his fifty years. In one respect his photographic portraits do him injustice. His face is haughty in repose, and this expression is emphasized by his commanding presence and resolute air. But no one ever thinks of Mistral as haughty who has seen him smile. It is as frank as his manner, this smile; all his face is lit up by the friendliness that is in his warm Provençal heart.

In a flash he had us out of the carriage, around the house, through the wide entrance-hall paved with tiles and hung about with prints, and so into his library—and all to an accompaniment of the most cordial welcoming talk. Roumanille had told him all about us, he said; we were not strangers, we were

friends. Heaven bless these Provençaux ! What a genuine hospitality is theirs !

Never did a poet have a better work-room than this library. Overlooking the garden are two wide, high windows, close beside one of which is a writing-table of liberal size; prints hang upon the walls; the side opposite to the windows is filled with a tall case of books. The collection of books is not a large one (not more than a thousand volumes), but it is very rich. For four months I had been making my own little collection on the same lines, and my evil heart was stirred with covetousness as I saw upon these shelves so many volumes which my good Catélan had told me were to be obtained only by some rare turn of lucky chance. But the book which Mistral first selected for us to look at was not one of these prizes in the literary lottery; it was a beautifully bound copy of Miss Preston's translation of "Mirèio." Before returning it to its place he held it for a moment affectionately in his hand.

In the same earnest strain in which Roumanille had spoken, he spoke of the strong motives underlying the literary movement in

Provence. There was much more in it, he said, than the desire to revive a beautiful language that had fallen into undeserved neglect. The soul of it was the firm purpose to array against centralization the love of locality, of home. "If our movement," he continued, "were restricted to Provence, it might be regarded without injustice as the last gleam of a dying glory, as the last effort of a nationality about to expire. But it is not so restricted. Languedoc, Dauphiny, Gascony, Brittany are with us. And our revival extends beyond the borders of France. In Catalonia, Aragon, Valencia, Majorca; in Italy, Hungary, Roumania, Bohemia, Flanders, even in Iceland, there is a revival of the ancient tongues. All this is not the work of chance, nor the result of the effort of a single group of men. It is the natural and inevitable result of the realization by each of these widely scattered peoples that in their national language resides their national soul. The Félibrige is the legitimate and providential child of the epoch in which we live.

"Here in France we have not sought unduly to exalt Provence or Provençal. We have urged our brethren of the other ancient

tongues to do what we have tried to do for ourselves—to add to their own store of literary treasure, to maintain their own customs, to preserve their own traditions; and yet, while thus holding fast to their own individuality, to cherish as their most noble possession their right to be a part of France.”¹

VI

MADAME MISTRAL joined us: a young and beautiful woman with a peculiarly sweet, sympathetic voice. Our talk turned to Mistral’s work. It pleased him to find that we possessed all of his poems, and even his “*Tresor dòu Félibrige*”—his great Provençal-French dictionary, 2300 triple-columned folio pages, to the compilation of which he devoted nearly ten years.

He sighed as he spoke of the dictionary, as well he might in memory of the labor that he

¹ “Whether we speak French or Provençal, ‘t is all the same. We understand each other. And there is one phrase that has the same sound in both languages; a phrase we all know, a heartfelt cry. This phrase, this cry, is—‘Vive la France!’” Speech of the Capoulié Félix Gras, at Carpentras, September 15, 1891.

had expended upon it for pure love. Yet has this work repaid him in honor. It has placed him beside Littré among French men of letters, and it has won for him the formal approbation of the Institut Français. In recognition of its high value, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres of the Institut awarded to him (March 28, 1890) the Jean Reynaud prize of 10,000 francs: a prize—given every five years “to recompense the most important work produced in that period in studies within the compass of the Academy”—that is one of the highest literary honors (short of election to the body whence it emanates) which a French man of letters can receive.

Primarily, the “Tresor” is a dictionary of all the languages of Oc (*i. e.*, the languages in which *oc* is the equivalent of *yes*); but it also is much more than a dictionary, being, literally, a treasury of information concerning the languages, the customs, the traditions of the south of France. It is not, as his poems are, the result of inspiration; it is the product of a profound scholarship backed by indefatigable labor extending over many years. Indeed, it seems impossible that the same man should have distinguished himself so greatly

in such widely different ways. As M. Michel Bréal (in presenting to Mistral the prize of the Academy, at Montpelier, May 25, 1890) well said: "A time will come when learned men, finding themselves confronted by this enormous philological work and by Mistral's poems, will say that there must have been two Frédéric Mistrals, as there were two Plinys—thus evading the tax upon their credulity involved in believing that so much science and so much poetry were contained in the same brain."

Naturally, his poems stand nearest to the poet's heart. He spoke of them with a frank pleasure, and of the local material embodied in them—this being a part of his own beloved country—with delight. To gratify our desire to associate the sound of his voice with his written words, he read to us, from "La Reino Jano," the speech of Aufan de Sisteroun, in which the troubadour urges the Queen to leave Naples and to come to Provence—"cette perle royale, l'abrégué, la montre et le miroir du monde." It was not a reading at random :

Accédant en général à votre douce autorité,
Là chaque ville vit de son droit naturel,
Et librement travaille, ou dort, ou chante, ou crie,

declares the troubadour—precisely the doctrine which Mistral himself had just been advancing, of separate individual rights united in support of high authority.

All this Provençal poetry gains greatly by being read aloud. There is music in the broad, sonorous sounds, and a rhythm in the composition so marked that frequently it is almost an air. Much of the verse evidently is written, consciously or unconsciously, to music. I noticed that Roumanille—writing a dedication in a volume that he had presented to the Ambassadress—beat time as he put the lines together in his mind; and not until the measure satisfied him did he write them down.

We were conscious of our privilege in hearing Mistral read his own poetry; and this privilege was enlarged when he sang to us the “Song of the Rowers”—as the Queen is borne out upon the bay of Naples in her barge—to an ancient thrilling air of the sort which had so moved us when we had listened to the singing of Félix Gras. I hope that he understood how grateful we were to him. King Louis of Bavaria, listening royally solitary to an opera, alone could be our parallel!

From his own poems we went on to speak of Provençal poetry generally; of the poems which we had read, and of the poets whom we had been so fortunate as to know personally—and especially of the strong friendship which these men had for each other, their freedom from petty jealousy, and their warm appreciation of each other's work. It was a part of their creed, he said, this friendliness. All were working together, as missionaries, as apostles, to a common end. Under these conditions mutual support was necessary, and jealousy was impossible—and again he insisted upon the sincerity and the depth of purpose which animated their literary movement and made it also broadly humane.

VII

WHILE we talked, a lank dog with a bristling black coat—a creature of no particular breed—jumped up on the wide outer ledge of the window and peered in upon us. His face had a quizzical cast, and his manner was so bantering that a charge of insolence would

have lain against him but for the look of good-humored drollery in his eyes. Having completed his survey, he jumped down from the window-ledge, and a moment later came in through the open door to make us his compliments—with the easy, rather swaggering air of an old campaigner whose habit it was to pass the time of day with all strangers on the chance of a dish of racy talk.

The genesis of this dog was as eccentric as himself. He had “come up out of the ground,” as Mistral expressed it—suddenly appearing in the course of one of the poet’s country walks, and immediately adopting him as a master. No one in all the country-side ever had seen him, or one like him. But with the assurance that was so conspicuous a trait in his nature, he had declined to be regarded as a stranger. He had made himself entirely at home in a moment, and had accepted with equanimity the name of *Pain-perdu*—he was no stickler for names, provided rations went with them—that was bestowed upon him: partly because of his famished condition, and partly in memory of the troubadour so called. He was a dog of magic, Mistral declared, who had started up from nowhere,

and who had thrust himself, either for good or for evil, into his new master's life.

But the poet cherished also the fancy that the dog—supposing him to be a real dog—was a waif from the Wild West Show; which aggregation of American talent had passed northward from Marseilles to Paris about the time that Pain-perdu materialized. Mistral has so much the look of Mr. Cody—a resemblance not a little helped by the slouched felt hat that he habitually wears—that in Paris he has been repeatedly pointed out on the streets as “Boofalo”; and he argued that Pain-perdu had adopted him for a master because of this resemblance. He begged that I would speak to the dog in English; and it is a fact that the uncanny creature cocked his head at me with a most knowing look, and did seem to understand my words.

An older and more important member of the family is Marcabrun, a large grey cat of so dignified a habit that he might with propriety wear ermine, instead of his own grey coat, and sit upon the bench. We were bidden to observe that he was not a toy cat—one of those long-haired, bushy-tailed creatures to which the Parisians are devoted—

but a sturdy, mouse-catching, working cat, of honest Egyptian descent; a cat whose conscientious discharge of his duties was honorable to himself and useful to his friends. "I have a very sincere affection for cats," said Mistral, as he gently stroked Marcabrun's jowls. "And I am persuaded," he added gravely, "that their knowledge extends to many things too subtle for the human mind to grasp!"

We passed to the salon, where Madame Mistral had a tray of liqueurs in readiness for the ceremony—which on our side certainly had in it much earnestness—of drinking to each other's health, and to the continuance of the friendship that had begun that day. And then we touched glasses again in honor of the poets and poetry of Provence.

The day was waning. It was time for us to come away. We lingered for a few minutes in the garden, while Madame gathered for the Ambassadress a bunch of flowers, to which the poet added (running down to the hedge to get it) a spray of nerto. It is preserved as a precious relic, this bunch of nerto; and though in truth it has become dry and yellow, to us it always will seem fragrant and

green. Then they came with us to the gate, and stood waving farewells after us until a turn in the street hid them from our view. Here was another case in which ideals had stood the test of comparison with realities.

We drove back by the direct road—through Graveson and Rognonas, and so across the Durance and on into Avignon. Although a strong mistral was blowing—with which usually goes a brilliantly clear sky—clouds had gathered in the west. Into these clouds, beyond the line of hills on the farther side of the Rhône, the sun was sinking. To the eastward, the distant Alps loomed shadowy. In their forefront, tipped with red sunlight, towered Mont Ventour—as high above the lesser peaks as a great poet is above the common level of mankind.

PART FOURTH

I

THAT we should go to the Fountain of Vaucluse was a matter of necessity. As the ambassadors of a poet we were, in a sense, poets ourselves ; and for even a vicarious poet to be within a dozen miles of this time-honored shrine of poetic love and yet not visit it would be a sort of negative sacrilege, an outrage of neglect.

To be sure, as troubadours, we were disposed to look with but little favor upon the chillingly precise verses which the calm Petrarch addressed to his calm Laura ; to regard somewhat disdainfully an ardor so prudently iced. But—whether we approved or disapproved of his methods of love-making—the fact remained that this Signor Petrarch merited some token of outward respect from us, for the reason that he belonged to our brotherhood

and was one of ourselves. Therefore we decided that before going to Saint-Remy and to Salon we would bear away eastward to the Fountain of Vaucluse, and pay his memory a passing call.

La Ponette and the shabby little carriage were brought forth from the stables of the Hôtel de l'Europe—which we were led to infer from the hostler's supercilious air had been somewhat contaminated by giving shelter to our poverty-stricken equipage. On the other hand, had the humble Ponette known how lordly a price we paid for her subsistence in this aristocratic establishment, I am confident that her short and very thick head would have been completely turned. That our own heads were a little turned by the parallel process in our own case is undeniable. For several days after emerging from our golden and crimson quarters we maintained the fiction that we were ticket-of-leave sovereigns, and made a point of addressing each other as “Your Grace.”

Amidst the open smiles of the waiters, stable-boys, and other hangers-on of the Hôtel de l'Europe, we drove forth from the court-yard and shaped our course—having a cargo

of books to pick up at Roumanille's shop—for the Rue St. Agricol. All the members of the household flocked out to feast their eyes upon our car of state drawn by our gallant steed. As I close my eyes I can see Roumanille leaning for support against the door-jamb, and I can hear the ring of his laugh. We had endeavored to prepare him for the spectacle; but he told us frankly, in a voice broken with emotion, that what he had regarded as efforts of our imagination had given him but a feeble notion of the truth. But Roumanille was forced to admit—as we stowed the books in the locker beneath the seat, and disposed of the big package of photographs between the apron and the dashboard—that a good deal was to be said in favor of our conveyance on the score of practical convenience. What it seemed to lack, he said, was style.

Our parting that day was only temporary. We were to come back presently—traveling like ordinary mortals in an ordinary railway-carriage—for a long visit. Therefore we said *au revoir* with good heart, and got under way without regret—Roumanille standing out on the pavement, still laughing, until the turn

into the Cours de la République hid him from our sight.

Over our passage down this street, the Broadway of Avignon, I draw a veil. It is sufficient to say that we attracted more attention, a great deal more, than our modesty desired. It was with a sigh of relief that we passed the city gate, and so came in a few minutes into the quiet country road leading eastward to L'Isle-sur-Sorgue. There are times in one's life, and this was one of them, when the grateful vacancy of the country brings rest and soothing to the mind harried by a city's noise and crowd.

Our way led eastward; but we actually took a route southeastward, that we might spend a few hours in the gay company of the swiftest and most joyous river in all Europe, the Durance. It was a charming road, this, that led us through parks and gardens from the outer edge of the valley to the riverside. Great trees arched over us; pollard willows were ranged along the irrigating canals in unending lines; the soft gurgling sound of flowing water filled the air. Now and then we met or passed a friendly traveler with whom we exchanged greetings. From an old

stone gateway, just touched by a sunbeam that penetrated the thick foliage above it, a little girl came out and held up for our admiration her new doll—a very Sheban of a doll, dressed in vivid yellow and girded with a scarlet sash. The Ponette jogged along in her own slow way, and we did not hurry her. Had she known our humor, she would have turned it to her private profit by going at a walk.

About noon, swinging away to the north, we parted company with the Durance at Bonpas. It is a silk-factory, now, this ancient abbey—a change fit to make the dust of Simon Langham, the Archbishop of Canterbury who built the abbey church, compact itself again and arise in the shape of a curse. The Bridge-building Brothers threw a bridge of stone across the river here; but the river promptly threw it off again, and its several successors after it. Now, quite in keeping with the silk-factory, the stream is spanned by a suspension-bridge—the only sort of structure that this light-hearted devil of a river does not sooner or later get the better of.

Across the valley, a couple of miles away, is Noves, where of old Laura lived. For a

moment we hung in the wind, at the fork of the road, while we debated the propriety of turning aside to visit her former habitation. But Laura is distinctly a second-rate personage. The best that can be said of her is that she was the consignee of Petrarch's verses. The debate was a short one.

“We cannot be at the mercy of every whiff of Fancy's breeze,” said the Ambassador.

“We must occasionally be firm to our intentions,” said the Ambassadress.

And, having uttered these resolute words of wisdom, we turned our backs upon Noves and Laura, and bore away for Thor. We had been assured, I may say in passing, that in Thor, at the little Hôtel de Notre Dame, we should get a good breakfast; had we possessed a like assurance in regard to the breakfast possibilities of Noves, the case thus decided against Laura might have gone differently.

II

MIDWAY in the village of Thor the highway takes a sharp turn; and just in its bend, so

that the traveler cannot possibly miss it, is the hospitably open entrance to the Hôtel de Notre Dame. A woman nursing a plump baby rose to greet us as we drove in, and a stern hostler—having the look and manner of Prince Bismarck—came forth from the stable and took charge of the mare. That we might wash away the dust of our journey, we were shown to a little box of a bedroom. All the floors were of stone; the steps of the narrow stair were of stone, worn deeply; and in keeping with this fine flavor of antiquity was the garnishing of the kitchen fireplace with delightful tiles. Excepting the new humanity that had come into it, I doubt if there had been the smallest change in this whole establishment for a round two hundred years. The baby was very new indeed, and his young mother thought the world of him. She held him on one arm during most of the time that she was engaged in getting breakfast ready, but popped him down anywhere—on the table or into a basket half filled with potatoes—when she required the use of both hands. When at last breakfast was served, he was stowed away in a big cradle in one corner of the dining-room.

Four people breakfasted with us; but they all were shy and taciturn, and only one of them—a carter in his shirt-sleeves—looked interesting. Had we been alone with the carter, we should have made friends with him; but he was oppressed, as we were, by the chill presence of the other half of our company, and devoted his large mouth solely to eating and drinking. Yet was he naturally a voluble man, and with a fine loud voice: as we knew—a moment after he had bolted his last mouthful, and had left the table with a jerky bow—by hearing him roaring away in animated talk with Prince Bismarck outside.

On the wall of the dining-room was a notice stating that the Mayor of Thor had the honor to inform the public that the annual market of grapes of all qualities would be held in the commune, at the accustomed place, on the 25th of August and the 15th of October, proximo. All about the town were vineyards, and the crisp aromatic smell of the ripening grapes hung heavy in the air. At the little *café*, whither we went when our breakfast was ended, the old man who served us spoke of the vintage with enthusiasm. The vines had done well, wonderfully well, he said. A

great harvest was assured. "And when our grapes are good," he added jollily, "we laugh and jingle our money in our pockets through all the rest of the year."

He was charmingly talkative, this old man—quite unlike the sad company at breakfast that had erected a chill barrier of silence between the carter and ourselves. My pipe appealed to him. "It is a fine large pipe that monsieur smokes," he said cordially. "And is it really so light as they say, this German clay? Will monsieur indeed permit me? . . . *Mon Dieu*, how light! What a wonder of a pipe it is!" After the severe repression to which our natures had been subjected at breakfast, coming into the presence of this genial old man was like coming forth into sunshine from a cold, dark room.

While the Ponette rested—what she had to rest from Heaven only knows; in all the morning she had covered only eight or ten miles—we paid our respects to the unknown architect who seven hundred years ago built the church for which Thor ever since has been famed. This duty to art and antiquity being discharged, we ascended into our chariot, and then the Ponette's scarcely perceptible pro-

gress detached us gently from Thor, and set us adrift in the direction of L'Isle-sur-Sorgue.

From the one town to the other is but a step. Even the Ponette could not make a journey of it. By mid-afternoon we were bowling along the shady main street, beside the main channel of the Sorgue, at a spirited walk; and so came gallantly to the door of the Hotel St. Martin. It is customary for visitors to the Fountain of Vaucluse to stop at the Hotel de Pétrarque-et-Laure; but in our case —apart from our coolness toward those cool lovers—there was so much of appositeness in finding shelter for ourselves and our beggarly equipage at a hotel presided over by St. Martin that we did not hesitate for a moment in making our choice.

III

L'ISLE is nothing less than a fascination — a tiny Venice, without the bad smells. The Sorgue, outflowing from the near-by Fountain of Vaucluse, divides above the town into three channels, which below it are united again into a single stream. Upon the northern island, and around about it, the town is built. The

main stream, at its widest but a couple of rods across, shaded by ancient trees, flows beside the highway—which also is the principal street of the town. Stone bridges span it here and there; broad flights of stone steps, with the look of having escaped from a drop-curtain, lead down to its margin and are thronged with operatic washerwomen; huge undershot wheels slowly revolve in it (a good deal of unpoetic carpet-weaving is done here), and suggest melodramatic possibilities of a thrilling and shuddering sort—there being always about a great water-wheel something very horrible that sends a chill to one's heart. The southern branch flows along the town's outskirts; and the northern, not more than six or eight feet wide, runs in a strait channel between the houses—and even under them—with doors and windows opening upon the stream. All day long the cool sound of rippling water is in the air; and its lulling tinkle comes soothingly across the soft silence of the night.

It was the boast of the people of L'Isle in former times—before there was thrust upon the Fountain of Vaucluse a desecrating paper-mill—that they could sit at their ease in their houses and fish for trout and eels

through their open doors. Noble traditions survive of these dainties, and of a certain delicate variety of crawfish, with which the Sorgue did once abound. According to the guide-books and the hotel people, the Sorgue abounds with them still; and the representative of St. Martin even went so far as to assure us that the specimens served for our delectation had come from the river to the pan with but a single bound. Yet, in point of fact, because of that vile paper-mill, the fish of the Sorgue are all as dead as Julius Cæsar. The hotel fish really come from the Gardon—clear on the other side of the Rhône—and do their bounding in the wake of a locomotive by *grande vitesse*. This painful secret was imparted to us by the proprietor of the café: an intelligent young man who had no motive for abetting the local fiction, and whose business was of a sort to set him a little at odds with the proprietors of the hotels.

IV

WHILE these facts in regard to the migrant nature of the fish of L'Isle were being con-

fided to us—we were taking our after-dinner coffee—a man passed by beating loudly upon a drum. His untempered music, we found, was the announcement of a play to be given that very evening in an open-air theater down by the water-side in the rear of our hotel. The players, said our young man, were the wreckage of a strolling company that had gone to pieces in L'Isle a month or two before; they gave occasional performances to keep themselves alive until some happy turn of fortune should enable them to get away.

As we found when we had come to it, this open-air theater justified its name. The stage was a raised and covered platform, with a practicable curtain; but the seats, cut off from the rest of the universe by a wooden fence, had between them and the sky only some chance branches of trees. The best seats—two rows of chairs which stood in front of the eight or ten lines of benches without backs—cost twenty centimes. We unhesitatingly paid our eight cents, and took places in the front row.

There were six players, all told, and the cast included seven characters. In the first act the *Villain*—quite a desperate villain—

very properly was killed ; but in the second act he confused us by reappearing—it was the same man in precisely the same costume—alive and well. As the play went on, however, we discovered that he had ceased to be the *Villain*, and at a stroke had become his own uncle and the respectable father of the *Marchioness*. We inferred that there was a shortness in the wardrobe as well as in the company ; and this probability was emphasized by the references in the lines to the somber black in which the *Marchioness* was clad, when, actually, that interesting young widow was arrayed in a gown of exceptionally bright blue.

Between the tragedy and the farce the *Ingénue* came out among the audience and supplemented the gate-money by taking up a collection in a tin box, her efforts being most pointedly directed to squeezing something out of the crowd that was massed outside the railing and had not paid anything at all. The *Dueña*, not cast in the farce, resumed possession of her brace of children, who had been in the care of friends on the benches, and went home with them when the tragedy was at an end. We heard her say something about breakfast the next day and a pot of tripe. At

the end of the performance the *Tyrant* made us all a handsome speech of thanks, and announced that on the ensuing Thursday the company would have the honor of presenting the tragedy of "Jeanne d'Arc," to be followed by a side-splitting farce. I was disposed to arise in my place and to assure the *Tyrant* that for ourselves the obligation was wholly on our side. It was a longing of our hearts realized—this veritable bit out of "Le Capitaine Fracasse."

V

BEFORE returning to our quarters, we walked for a while in the starlight beside the Sorgue: seeking to attune our souls by its rippling music to the key of poesy fitting to the pilgrimage on the ensuing day to the Fountain of Vaucluse. In this endeavor we succeeded so well that I was beginning to put together an apostrophic sonnet to Laura and Petrarch, when sleep overtook me and obliterated the concluding ten of the necessary fourteen lines. And then, at five o'clock in the morning, came the proprietor of the Hôtel St. Martin, with violent knockings, to inform me that the

Ponette had developed a severe colic and was in a very bad way indeed !

For all the remainder of my days the Fountain of Vaucluse will be associated in my mind with the keen internal miseries of that dull little mare. Never will I hear a reference to Laura and Petrarch without instantly remembering the unpoetic nature of my frequent conferences with the veterinary surgeon, who was the better, as I was the worse, on each of these occasions by two francs.

It was the late Lord Verulam who made the astute observation (in his essay "Of Seditions and Troubles") that "the rebellions of the belly are the worst." But even my Lord Verulam, who was blessed with a fine vein of fancy, never imagined a rebellion of this nature at so inopportune a time. Instead of reveling in a luxury of poetic reminiscence, I was forced to dwell upon the prosaic details of equine pathology; while a haunting dread beset me of what would happen should the sluggish soul of the Ponette separate itself from her sluggish body, and so bring me to a direful reckoning with Noé Mourgue at Nimes !

Happily for me, the Ponette was endowed with so vigorous a constitution that she did

not succumb to her painful disorder. By the ensuing morning she practically was well again, the veterinary surgeon assured me; and as his interest was wholly against this statement, I did not doubt that he spoke the truth. But it was with chastened spirits that we drove her gingerly to the Fountain of Vaucluse; and our conversation turned not upon Laura and Petrarch, but upon the possible further internal disturbances of the mare. Positively, it made me nervous when she but twitched her ears!

Yet, in despite of these painful memories of the trials and tribulations which befell me there, I think of L'Isle-sur-Sorgue only with an affectionate tenderness. It possesses a beautiful old church, it is renowned for the excellence of its dried fruits, and there is in its composition a most wonderful mingling of sparkling water and sparkling sunshine. These merits are considerable; but its greater merit, wherein lies its especial charm for me, is its habit of repose. I never have known a town where a larger proportion of the towns-folk seemed to have so comfortably little to do. Their capacity for being negatively busy—that is to say, for consciously and deliberately doing nothing: a very different

thing from mere idleness—is a perfect realization of a beautiful ideal. During the three days of our sojourn there some masons were making believe to be at work upon repairs to the wall of the main canal—close beside an old stone bridge whereon was cast by a great plane-tree growing beside it a rest-inviting shade. All day long relays of the towns-people accepted the invitation of the plane-tree and sat upon the parapet of the bridge, watching with an intelligently languid interest the masons keeping up their show of toil. Sometimes the members of these self-appointed committees fairly went to sleep. But it was only by looking closely that their somnolence was apparent—so exquisite, even in their widest wakefulness, was their repose. A town like that is a bulwark of civilization, against which the Huns and Goths of our era, whose barbaric war-cry is “Haste!” may strive in vain.

SALON, where dwelt of old the prophet Nostradamus, lies due south of L’Isle at a distance of twenty miles. But by going along

two sides of a triangle, only thirty miles or so out of the direct way, we were able to lay a course through Saint-Remy and Les Baux that was much more to our minds. Our visit to Salon was a matter of diplomatic necessity—to the end that, as Ambassadors, we might wait upon the chief citizen of that town: Monsieur Antoine Blaise Crousillat, oldest of all the Félibres, to whom his brethren have given the affectionate title of dean of their poetic guild.

Early in the morning I held a final conference (at the regular two-franc rate) with the veterinary surgeon; received his positive assurance that the revolt in the interior of the Ponette was wholly quelled; and by seven o'clock we were on the road. We started at this untoward hour partly because we expected to drive far that day, and partly because the Ponette's physician in ordinary had warned us against pushing her at too great a speed. Little did this man know about her, or never would he have coupled her name with so vivacious a word! His counsel was delivered in her presence, and she very obviously made a note of it for her own purposes. That day she outdid herself in prodigies of laziness, and whenever I ventured mildly to

remonstrate with her, she would give a warning quiver to her fat flanks which thrilled us with alarm. She was dull, the Ponette, but not stupid—oh, no!

Although the landscape may be said to have clung to our chariot wheels with an affectionate persistence, we did actually advance. By nine o'clock we were in Cavaillon—a bowery little town, famous in all this part of France for its melons. The elder Dumas made a solemn gift of his collected works to the municipality of Cavaillon, on the express condition that every year he should receive a tribute of its melons; which tribute—it was a good business transaction for the novelist, for in Paris the melons of Cavaillon are fruit of price—was paid regularly until the contract was liquidated by his death. By ten o'clock we had crossed the Durance; and a little before noon we gently edged our way into Saint-Remy—when the Ponette, being of a gluttonous habit, suddenly snuffed at possibilities of breakfast, and brought us almost at a trot into the *remise* of the Hôtel du Cheval Blanc.

It is a delightful old tavern, this: with narrow stairways of stone, crooked passages

of various levels laid in tiles, tile-paved chambers with ancient heavy furniture, the lower rooms vaulted, the dining-room fairly extending out into the open air under a vine-clad arbor, and beyond the arbor an acre or more of tangled garden in which grow all together fruit-trees and shade-trees and shrubbery and vegetables and flowers. A beautiful woman, in the beautiful dress of Arles, received us with the most cordial of smiles. It was as though she had been waiting long for our coming, and was joyful because at last we had arrived. And she backed in a practical fashion her display of hospitality by giving us a breakfast fit for the Lords of Baux.

Most gentle is the business carried on by the people of Saint-Remy: the raising of flowers and the sale of their seed. All around the town are fields of flowers; and the flowers are suffered to grow to full maturity, and then to die their own sweet death, to the end that their seed may be garnered and sold abroad. Everywhere delicate odors floated about us in the air; and, although our coming was in August, bright colors still mingled everywhere with the green of leaves and grass. Insensibly, their gracious manner of earning

a livelihood has reacted upon the people themselves: the folk of Saint-Remy are notable for their gentleness and kindness even among their gentle and kindly fellows of Provence. We understood better Roumanille's beautiful nature when we thus came to know the town of gardens wherein he was born, and we also appreciated more keenly the verse—in his exquisite little poem to his mother—in which he chronicles his birth:

In a farm-house hidden in the midst of apple-trees,
On a beautiful morning in harvest-time,
I was born to a gardener and a gardener's wife
In the gardens of Saint-Remy.

In Saint-Remy was born, and now dwells (though we were not so fortunate, on this occasion, as to encounter him), still another poet: Monsieur Marius Girard, Syndic des Félibres de Provence, Félibre majoral, Maître en Gai-savoir, Chevalier of the Order of Charles III. of Spain — who especially is the laureate of the mountains near which he lives. Into his “Lis Aupiho” he has gathered the many strange legends of the Alpines, and has enhanced the value of his poetry by his scholarly researches into the curious history

and sociology of this isolated mountain-range: and so has won deservedly the crown of the floral games at Apt and the olive-branch of the Academy of Béziers. And, finally, in Saint-Remy lives the present queen of the Félibres, Mademoiselle Girard, who was chosen to her high office at the septennial festival held at Les Baux in August, 1892.

But the wonder is not that two poets and a queen of poets have been born in Saint-Remy. Rather is it that the ordinary speech of every one born in this delicately delectable little town is not pure iambics; that there should not be poetry in every mouth (as at Abdera), "like the natural notes of some sweet melody which drops from it whether it will or no."

VII

In the early afternoon we went onward, by a road that led up a mountain pass into the very heart of the Alpines, to Les Baux. A red-nosed man gave us the doubtful benefit of his company during our exploration of the

ruined castle and the partly ruined town. It was his custom to act as a guide, he said; and he seemed to think that this exposition of his own habits, without regard to what our habits in the matter of guides might be, was amply sufficient in the premises. But in his whole vinous body there was not an atom of usefulness, either as a guide or as anything else; and his meager soul—injudiciously preserved in alcohol—was quite in keeping with its useless carnal environment.

There was no need for a guide. The ruins spoke for themselves—a wreck so total, so wild, so harsh, that upon it seemed to have fallen relentlessly the withering wrath of God. The few poverty-stricken souls, quarry-men and their ragged families, who found shelter in what remained of the houses, seemed to be crushed down under the same general curse. The red-nosed man officially led us to a sheer cliff, a fall of a hundred feet or more, over which a woman but recently had cast herself, he said, because she was so miserably poor and her life was so bitter and so hard. Beholding the dreary ruins amidst which this sorrowful creature's home had been, and hearing told with a rasping minute-

ness the details of her broken-hearted life, we did not wonder that in a crisis of heroic cowardice she had leaped out from the dark certainties of that height and of Time together into the luringly bright uncertainties of Eternity.

It added to the desolateness of the wreck of castle and town that this red-nosed abomination should be, as he seemed to be, the most prominent citizen of the ruin of all over which the Lords of Baux had reigned — glorying in their descent in a right line from the youngest and the bravest of the Magi; bearing for their device the sixteen-rayed star of Bethlehem; and upholding valiantly through the centuries their war-cry: “Au hazard, Balthazar!”

Even on that mountain height the day was waning when at last we turned to go. We came back to the wretched inn, and there waited until the boy into whose charge I had given the Ponette should harness her again. It was an unwise consideration for the comfort of the Ponette that had led me to order the harness taken off — as I perceived when that utterly incompetent boy attempted to replace it. Even the stolid little mare seemed to smile at

him as she turned her head and contemplated his misdoings; and the quarrymen, standing about the doors of the *buvette* and the worse for their evening drams, openly laughed. The red-nosed man officially tried to help, and only got the harness more tangled. In the end, I had to shove them both aside and do the harnessing myself—with an inward prayer that I might do it well enough to hold together until we got back to Saint-Remy.

We went down the mountain road at a good trot, with the brakes set hard. The road was as smooth as French roads—barring *chemins d'exploitation*—always are, and the descent was sharp: even the Ponette could not refuse to trot with the carriage fairly pushing her along. Dusk was falling on the heights, and darkness had come by the time that we reached the plain. From the unseen fields of flowers sweet scents were borne to us; sweetest of all being the richly delicate odor from a field of heliotrope close beside us, but hidden in the bosom of the night.

Our dinner at the Cheval Blanc was served to us at a small table in the arbor—lighted by lamps hung from the lattice—close beside

the vine-covered archway that opened upon the dark garden beyond. At another small table three elderly men were dining, who bowed to us gravely as we took our seats, but who were sufficiently remote from us to make an attempt at general conversation unnecessary. To one of them—a pleasant-looking old boy, with a mahogany face that testified to an outdoor habit of life and to a liking for honest red wine—we evidently were objects of interest. We caught him shooting sidelong looks at us, and he evidently was keeping his ears wide open to our English talk. They finished their dinner before we had finished ours, and again we interchanged bows as they rose to leave. But our mahogany-faced gentleman was not quite done with us. In the doorway he paused for a moment, as though steadying himself for some venturesome deed. Then, with another bow, he said with a sharp abruptness: "Good night"—and instantly disappeared! .

It was most startling to have this scrap of English fired at us, at point-blank range, with the unexpectedness of a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. Obviously, however, the effect of his deliverance was most severe upon him-

self—the recoil incident to his lingual explosion carrying him clear out of our sight. Doubtless his digestion that night was the worse for his violent tampering with a foreign tongue. And did we, in that single lurid gleam of speech, get the benefit of his entire English vocabulary? We never knew!

Bearing in her hands our two candles, our beautiful hostess piloted us to our bed-chamber—up the narrow worn stone stairway, along the narrow crooked passages broken by incidental flights of steps, and so to the large tile-paved room whereof the mahogany furniture had grown black with age, and where everything was exquisitely clean. The bed-linen had a faint smell of lavender, and the beds were comfortable to a degree. As I sank away into sleep I was aware of the delicate, delicious odor of flowers swept in through the open window by the soft night wind.

VIII

ALL Saint-Remy was astir—'t was the Feast of the Assumption—as we left it the

next day. The shady Place d'Armes was crowded with men in blouses, who ate melons, and smoked short pipes, and all the while talked so vigorously that there was a buzzing in the air as though of bees. The women—beautiful with a stately beauty, and wearing the beautiful dress of Arles—were clustered in front of the church, wherein they attended to their religious duties in relays, and added to the buzzing a sharper note with the simultaneous going of all their tongues. Every moment the two gatherings were enlarged by new recruits come in from the outlying farms: affluent country-folk in high two-wheeled carts drawn by round little horses of the Camargue, or less affluent country-folk who came joyfully to the feast on the two legs which God had given them.

Only our strong sense of duty as Ambassadors enabled us to fetch away from Saint-Remy and the glad company assembled there and to go onward to Salon. As we drove off through the flower-fields, and then through vineyards and olive-orchards and plantations of almond trees, the feast still was present with us in the persons of those whom we met going to it, all gallant in their feast-day

clothes. Toward the end of our journey we met other holiday folk returning from Salon; and then our hearts were comforted for the loss of Saint-Remy by our delight in this bravely castellated little city set sturdily upon its hill.

Our credentials to the dean of the Félibres were as slight as ever an embassy carried. "He lives beside the fountain," said Roumanille. "Tell him that you come from me." That was all! But we knew that it was sufficient. Doubts as to our calling we never had entertained; and the welcome that had been given us at Avignon had convinced us that our election was altogether sure.

We had ample time to present ourselves to Monsieur Crousillat before dinner—it was but half after five when our establishment at the very comfortable Hôtel des Négociants was completed, and the days still were long. When we asked for information in regard to the whereabouts of Monsieur Crousillat's home, 'Toinette, the daughter of the house—plump as a little partridge and beaming with smiles—instantly offered to be our guide. "It is but a step," she said. "You turn the corner and you are upon the boulevard—in a

moment you come to the fountain and the Place d'Aubes. But were it a great deal farther," she added earnestly, "I should have the most of pleasure in showing m'sieu'-madame the way." She was the kindest-hearted little creature in the world, this good 'Toinette. The next day she went with us to the church in which Nostradamus lies buried, where we encountered a crusty sacristan whose stock of merchantable civility was sold in small portions at the rate of fifty centimes each. The rate struck me as low; but 'Toinette, witnessing the purchase of that which by her creed should be given freely, was sincerely shocked. "To think," she said, "of being paid for politeness! That is not the way in our town." And presently she repeated: "No, that is not the way in our town at all!"

'Toinette's courtesy was as delicately discriminating as it was cordial. When she had led us nearly to Monsieur Croussillat's door she left us—"because m'sieu'-madame doubtless wish to make this visit alone," she said. She could not have exhibited a nicer consideration had she been the very finest lady in the land.

We knocked at the door of the poet's house, but there was no reply; nor was there when we knocked again. Our third knock brought out from a shoe-shop in the adjoining house a pleasant-faced young girl, who informed us that no one was at home just then, and advised us to return at six o'clock—when we would be sure to find some one, because that was the hour at which the family supped. It was with the utmost good-heartedness that she spoke, and with the air of one to whom the success of our visit was a matter of serious concern.

There is not anywhere a more delightful town than Salon in which to ramble in the quiet time of sunset. All the center of it—the part lying about the castle, within what were the limits of the ancient walls—is a tangle of narrow crooked streets, which give fresh combinations of picturesqueness at every turn; outside of this tightly compressed area, occupying the site of walls and moat, is a broad boulevard shaded by double lines of trees; and beyond the boulevard are houses set more openly, between which are far views out over the vast level of the Crau, or across

vineyards and olive-orchards to the distant hills.

So charming was it all that the hour was nearer half after six than six when we returned to Monsieur Crousillat's door. The pleasant-faced young girl was on the lookout for us, and with her was her pleasant-faced mother. The mother begged that we would not knock—"because M'sieu' Antoine is at his supper, and it is not well, as madame no doubt knows, to interrupt old people at their meals." And then she added with a frank friendliness: "Perhaps madame and m'sieu' will have the goodness to seat themselves in my shop and wait for just a very little while; it certainly will not be long."

They made us as welcome as though we had been old friends, yet kept in view the fact that we were distinguished strangers, and preened their feathers—while cooing perfunctory dissent—as our magnificences were pleased to express an obviously sincere admiration for their town. Then a neighbor dropped in, and took a lively part in our dish of friendly talk; and so, for half an hour, we all chatted away together as comfortably as

though we had known one another through the whole of our respective lives.

IX

WHEN, at last, we despatched the young girl upon a reconnoissance, Monsieur Croussillat returned with her—in a fine state of perturbation because we had been kept waiting for so long a while. He was a most sprightly old gentleman, with a fresh complexion decidedly at odds with his full white beard, and carried jauntily his five-and-seventy years. In his eagerness to make amends for our waiting, he scarce gave us time to say good night to our obliging friends of the shoe-shop: in a moment we were whisked out of it and into his own home. And his cordiality was of a sort that manifested itself in deeds as well as in words: with what an amiable energy did he lead us first to the house of Nostradamus, and thereafter about the town, expounding to us its history and its traditions, on the ensuing day!

Just within the doorway his sister was wait-

ing to welcome us—a gracious little white-haired lady, with a lively yet gentle manner, and with the freshness of youth still lingering upon her sweet old face. With her was their elder brother, to whom we were presented with a certain amount of ceremony: a vigorous young gentleman of eighty-five. There was a becoming touch of gravity in his manner; but this seemed to be due to his responsible position as head of the family rather than to his years. It was the most charmingly quaint household that can be imagined—where the perpetual youth of sweet and gentle natures had held a gallant guard upon the threshold against the assaults of age. The most delicate touches of all were shown in the affectionate deference of the *cadet* and the young sister toward the head of their house; and in the loving pride with which the poet was regarded by his kinsfolk—this poet who was their very own, united to them by the closest ties of blood, yet who was on terms with the Muses and had won for himself the recognized right to fetch honey freely from Hymettus Hill.

The poetry of Monsieur Crousillat is graver in tone than is that of the majority of his fel-

low Félibres. In the preface to his collection of “Noëls”—which work he did the Ambassadress the honor to present to her—he has written: “The main object of all poets being to instruct as well as to please, I have, from love of truth, though not forgetting that poetry is tinged with fiction, imposed upon myself the duty of avoiding a little what is legend alone and what belongs entirely to theology. And I have endeavored within the limits of my power to make each of my noëls teach, as fables teach, a moral lesson.” Yet is there a strain of exceeding tenderness in his grave verse, and a naïve simplicity which gives it a touching and peculiar charm.

He is a master of many tongues, this oldest of the poets of Provence: uniting with the two languages which are his birthright a knowledge of Italian, gained in the course of an enchanting journey into Italy in the time of his youth; an elegant Latinity, that finds expression in highly finished verse; and a reading command of English. Two English poets are especially dear to him: Milton and Dryden. With the first of these his own utterances, though less grandiose and more humane, have something in common; and it

is easy to perceive how the verse of Dryden—flowing, melodious, sonorous—commends itself to one whose own rich language especially is suited to the composition of poetry in which precisely these qualities are found.

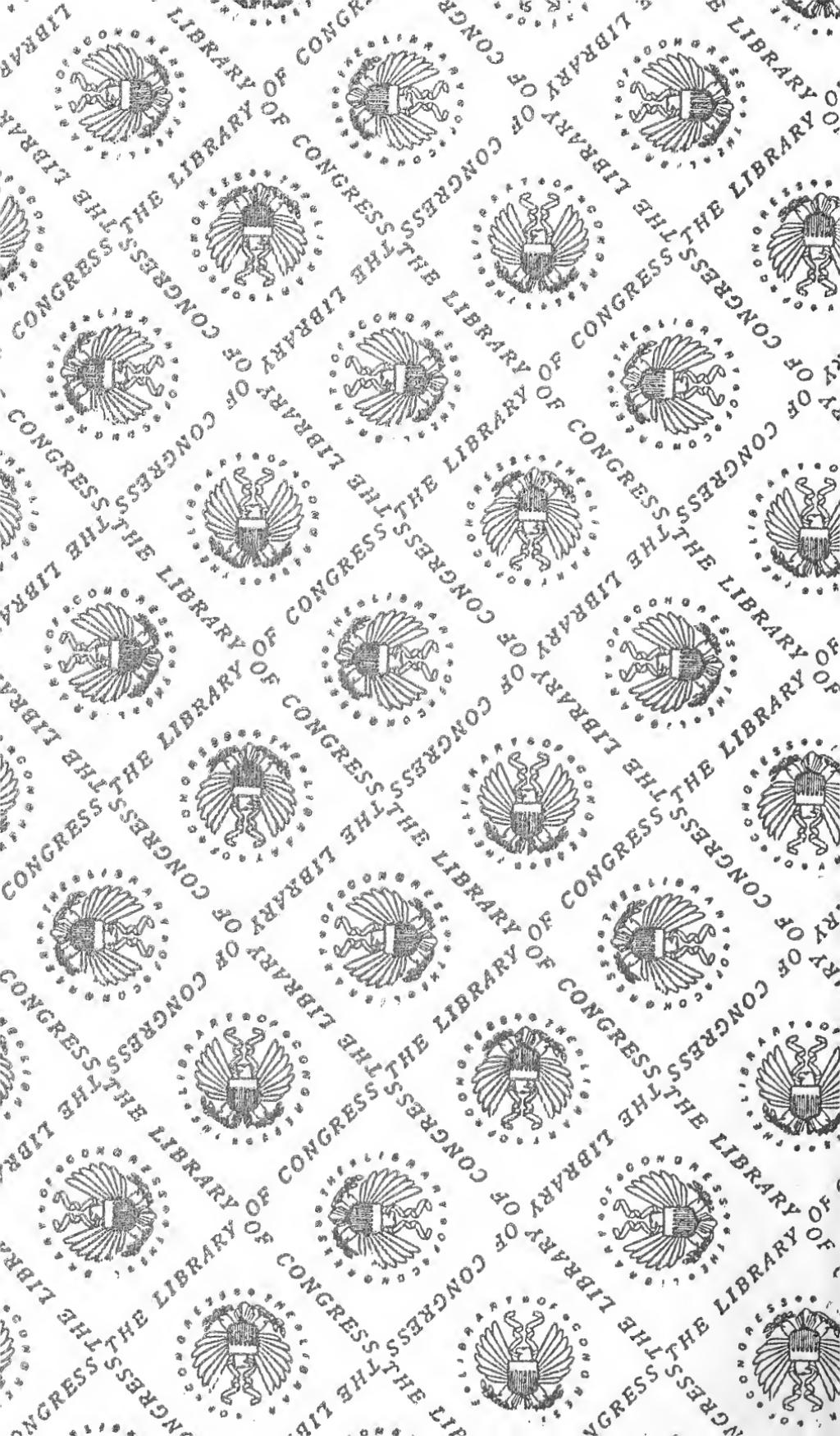
For the lack of opportunity to train his ear to its sound, Monsieur Crousillat could not understand spoken English; nor did he venture to speak it. He could write it, he said; and even had carried on an English correspondence with a cousin living in our own country, in Philadelphia—the daughter of a refugee from France in '89. Once she had come to Salon, this kinswoman, and had paid them a visit. But that, he added slowly, was a long, long while ago—nearly half a century. After her return to America their letters had sped back and forth briskly for a time; but as they had grown old the letter-writing had languished; and at last it had ended—when she died.

There seemed to me to be a suggestion of the delicate perfume of ashes-of-roses about this episode of the American correspondence that had withered and perished so long ago. Later, I discovered that this was a case in which my fancy had led me astray; yet am

I entirely confident that the welcome given by the dean of the Félibres to the Embassy was the warmer because America was the country whence it came.

WITH this visit of respect to Monsieur Crousillat—that changed, without our taking thought about it, into a visit of affection—the stately formalities of our mission were at an end. As an Embassy we had presented ourselves to the Capoulié, and to the Senior Poet, of the Félibrige; our credentials had been approved by these high functionaries, and ourselves had been accepted as *personæ gratæ*. For the remainder of our stay near the Court of this Poetic Power we were entitled, as recognized Ambassadors, to receive from all its subjects—and, verily, we did receive—that cordial consideration which in such cases the comity of nations prescribes.

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